VILLA RUBEIN

JOHN SINJOHN

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VILLA RUBEIN

A NOVEL

BY

JOHN SINJOHN

Author of
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&c.

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To
B. L. S.

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VILLA RUBEIN

CHAPTER I

WALKING along the river wall at Botzen, Edmund Dawney said to Alois Harz:

"There's a family at Villa Rubein, that pink house—would you care to know them?"

The other answered with a smile:

"I like to know everybody, to see what they are like."

"Come with me this afternoon?"

"Perhaps."

They had stopped before an old house, that stood by itself upon the wall with a blind and deserted look; Harz kicked open the door. "Come in," he said, "it's not time for your breakfast yet. I feel I have a chance to paint the river to-day."

He ran up the uncarpeted stairs. Dawney followed; with thumbs hooked in the arm-holes of his waistcoat and head thrown back he mounted slowly.

In an attic, which occupied the entire top storey, Harz had already pulled a canvas in front of the window. He was a young man of medium height, square shouldered and active, with an

angular face, rather high cheek bones, and a strong, sharp chin. His eyes were steel blue under very flexible eyebrows, his nose long and thin with a high bridge. Dark, unparted hair fitted his head like a cap. He was a type of the *Condottière*, but for his brow, which was that of an idealist. His clothes were the clothes of a man who never gave them a second thought.

The room served him as studio, bed-room and sitting-room ; it was bare and chaotic. Below the window, the river rushed down the valley like a torrent of molten bronze. Harz dodged before the canvas with the movements of a fencer getting his distance, and his eyebrows worked like the nostrils of a hound.

Dawney had taken a seat upon a packing case with a peculiar deliberation of manner.

"Plenty water," he drawled : "plenty brown water ; the snows have gone with a rush this year. Observe ! the Talfer comes down brown, the Eisack comes down blue, and their result is the Etch—of a muddy green ; parable for you, my philosopher and painter, parable of the spring."

Harz was busy mixing colours, "Parables !" he said : "there's no time for parables ; there's no time for anything. *Bei Gott !* I'd like to be guaranteed for seventy years—Titian was ninety-nine when he died, he had a chance. Look at that poor fellow who died last week ! all that terrible struggle, and then—just at the turn !" His voice was rather harsh, breaking frequently into the kind of soft slur peculiar to those who use

patois; but he spoke English well with only an occasional German word such as *mit* for "with." When he smiled his whole face seemed to light up with bright kindliness.

Dawney lit a cigar, and appeared to meditate.

"You painters," he said at last, "have a pull over most people. You can strike out your own line. Now if I choose to treat a case out of the ordinary way, and it goes wrong, I'm ruined."

"Ah! Herr Doctor. If I don't paint what the public likes, I starve; but I will paint in my own way, in the end I get the best of it, you'll see."

"Not a bit! it pays to work in the groove till you've made a name; you can do what you like then, they'll lick your boots all the same."

"Ah! you don't love your work!"

Dawney answered slowly: "Never so happy as when I've got my hands full. I like a fight. But look here! I want to make money, I want to get known, I want to have a good time, good cigars, good wine. Hang it! I can't stand being uncomfortable, I've got to work it on the old lines; I don't like it, but I've got to. One starts in life with some sort of notion of the ideal—well, it's pretty nearly gone by the board with me. I've got to scrape along till I've made my name, and then my little man—then——" His cigar took an upward cant.

"Then—you won't be able. You pay for that first period."

"Take my chance of that, because I must—there's no other way."

"I'll make one."

"Humph!"

Harz took a step, held his brush poised in the attitude of a man casting a spear, and burst out: "A man must do the best in him. If he has got to suffer, well—let him suffer!"

Dawney stretched his large body, a calculating look had taken possession of his eyes; he drawled—

"You are 'a hard case'!"

"*Hein?*" said Harz.

"Tough," explained the other.

Harz grinned, "I've *had* to be tough."

Dawney rose, a halo of tobacco smoke was wreathed around his dark unruffled hair.

"Touching the Villa Rubein," he said, moving towards the door; "shall I call for you. They are English mostly—very decent people."

"No, thank you. I'm going to paint all day. I'm not here for long. I haven't time to know respectable families, where they expect one to do this and that—and wear some particular kind of clothes."

"Very well," said Dawney, "as you like;" and puffing out his chest he vanished slowly through a blanket looped across the doorway. A thought struck Harz. He called through the window,

"Come back and have some coffee!"

Dawney looked up smiling—his mouth made a little half-moon in his broad face.

"No thanks!" he said, "Ta-ta!"

Harz set a pot of coffee upon a spirit lamp, cut

himself a slice of black bread, and turned to his picture again. Through the window the freshness of the morning came to him; the freshness of sap and blossom and young leaves; the smell of the earth; the gladness of opened mountains, the new flight and song of birds; all the odour and enchantment and mysterious unrest of spring.

The blanket over the doorway shivered; a rough-haired fox-terrier, black-marked about the face, with shaggy tan eyebrows, suddenly appeared. He had the air of a dog who has discovered a new world; his hind quarters wagged ecstatically. He sniffed pleasantly at Hartz, showed the whites of his eyes, and uttered a sound between a yawn and a bark. A young voice called from below,

"Scruff! Thou naughty dog; *Schlingel!* will you not come?" Light footsteps were heard upon the stairs; in the distance an elderly voice was piping,

"Greta—where are you? You mustn't go up there!"

Through the blanket slipped a little girl in a blue linen frock, with long fair hair under a wide-brimmed hat.

Harz greeted her with a bow. She made a charming picture; her blue eyes and little mouth as round as O's, the colour flushing up in her cheeks, and a kind of soft consternation in her attitude.

Her features were irregular, the cheek-bones rather prominent, the nose flattish; but there was about her an air innocent and reflecting, quizzical, yet shy, that went at once to the heart.

"Oh!" she said, with a gasp; Harz smiled.

"Good morning! This is your dog?"

She did not answer, but looked at him still with the same soft bewilderment; then ran to the dog and seized him by the collar.

"Scr-ruff! Oh! thou naughty dog—the most bad dog," and the ends of her hair fell all about him. "Isn't he bad?" she said, looking up at Harz.

"I think he is very nice," remarked the latter gravely. "Shall I give him some bread?"

"Oh, no! you must not—I will beat him—and tell him he is bad; then he shall not do such things again." She gave the dog a couple of light pats, he received them with gruff remonstrance, and scrambled on to a bench, where he balanced, his stump of a tail on one side, his head hanging over the other, like the sign of the "Golden Fleece."

"Now he is sulky; he does that always when he is sulky. Is this your home?" she said, looking about her.

Harz laughed, a sensuous laugh that seemed to relax him from head to foot.

"I beg your pardon," he said at last· "it is my home—for the present. I'm a visitor, an artist."

"But I think you are of the country," she said, nodding.

"Certainly I am a Tyroler—yes, I am of this country."

"I have to speak English this morning, but I do not like it very much—because, also, I am half

Austrian, and I like it best; but my sister Christian is all English. There is Miss Naylor; she shall be very angry with me, you shall see."

She whispered, pointing to the entrance with a rosy-tipped forefinger, and looked at him ruefully.

Advancing into the room with a walk rather like the hop of a bird was a little, thin, middle-aged lady, habited in a grey serge dress, with narrow and very regular bands of claret-coloured velveteen; a small ebony cross dangled on her chest at the end of a steel chain, and she nervously twisted her hands, clad in black kid gloves rather white about the seams.

She had prematurely grey hair, quick brown eyes, and a twist at one corner of her mouth; she held her brown face, which was kind-looking, but long and narrow for the size of her head, a little on one side, and wore upon it an expression of apologetic vexation.

She enunciated quick sentences, that sounded as if she kept them on strings, and wanted to draw each one back into her mouth the moment she had let it out.

"Greta, how *can* you do such things? I don't know what your father would say. I am sure I don't know how to . . . so extraordinary . . . What a naughty girl you are!"

Harz took a step forward.

"Please . . ." he began.

"You must come at once—so very sorry—so awkward."

They were standing in a sort of ring; Harz

embarrassed and amused, nursing his chin; the little lady sawing the air with her parasol; Greta flushed and pouting, her eyes all dewy, and twisting an end of fair hair round her fingers. The dog sulked immoveably upon his bench.

Suddenly the coffee boiled.

"Oh, look!" cried Greta.

Little brown streams trickled from the saucepan. There was a general movement of consternation, but it turned to a laugh, when the dog, laying his ears back, and tucking in his tail, scurried round the room like a mad rabbit. The feeling of fellowship fell upon them. All began talking at once.

"You must stay and have coffee; ah! you must stay! I can't let you go!" and Harz proceeded to evolve wonderful mediums for drinking out of an unexpected corner. Miss Naylor explained:

"Along the river wall is our favourite walk; and Scruff . . . so awkward, so unfortunate . . . we did not think anyone lived here, the shutters are cracked, and the paint is peeling off so dreadfully. Have you been long in Botzen? Two months! Fancy! Doesn't the rain come in? You are not English? You are Tyrolese? but you speak English so well —There for seven years? Really! so fortunate! —it is Greta's morning for English."

Her eyes darted bewildered glances at the conical roof where the crossing of heavy beams made lurking places uncannily attractive; at a litter of brushes, tools, knives, and colours on a table made of old packing cases; at the big window looking over the river, innocent of glass, flush

with the floor, whence dangled a bit of rusty chain —relic of the time when the place had been a store-loft; her eyes were hastily averted from an unfinished figure of the nude upon a canvas.

All the time that her governess was speaking, Greta sat with her feet crossed, on a coloured blanket, dabbling the tip of her finger in a little pool of coffee, and gazing up at Harz with a look in her serious eyes as if she were continually saying to herself: "Shall I laugh? Shall I cry? Or shall I just go and find out?" Harz thought: "Wouldn't I like to paint her like that? A human 'forget-me-not'!" His gaze seemed to fascinate her, she kept her eyes fixed upon him. He poured out the coffee, handed bread and sugar, for there was no butter and no milk. Suddenly he put his own cup down, and, taking paper and some chalks, began to make a sketch. The action had an immediate effect upon his visitors. "Find out!" took complete control of Greta's eyes.

"Shall you show me?" she called, scrambling to her feet.

Miss Naylor made the mechanical comment:

"'Will' Greta—'will'; how often am I to tell you?" She had been having a bad time with her conscience, drinking her coffee in little gulps, and turning slightly horrified looks at the mattress and a large wooden tub full of water in a corner. It could not be right to stay in such a place! It was impolite to go! Her mind had been sawing up and down, like her coffee cup; but the incident of this sketch finally aroused the dragon. Why! it

was almost indecent! A dangerous thing! Would put vain thoughts into the child! She laid down her cup, and took her courage solemnly in both hands. Words escaped her jerkily with a severity born of nervousness.

"I think we must be going, it is very late—your father—so very kind of you, but I think we must be going. Scruff!" she called suddenly in a stern voice, giving the floor two taps with the end of her parasol. The terrier barked, backing into a plaster cast, which came down upon his tail and sent him flying through the doorway with a smothered yelp.

Greta followed swiftly, crying:

"*Ach! du armer Scrruffee!*"

Miss Naylor crossed the room in a sidelong and apologetic manner; bowing slightly she muttered a few words, and also disappeared.

Harz was left alone, his guests had vanished—the little girl with the fair hair and the face like a 'forget-me-not'; the little lady with the kindly gestures and the bird-like walk; the terrier. He looked round him; the room seemed hideous and empty all of a sudden. He gnawed at his moustache, muttered "Psss!" at the fallen cast; drank up his coffee, and threw down the sketch in his hand; then he took a paint brush and stood again before his picture, alternately frowning and smiling. Soon he had forgotten everything in his work.

CHAPTER II

A FEW mornings later Harz had been out early to sketch. He loitered homewards along the flood dyke, watching the shadows of the clouds pass like breaths across the vines and vanish among the jumbled roofs and green-topped spires of the town. A strong, sweet wind was blowing from the mountains, there was a stir in the branches of all the trees, flakes of late blossom drifted by. Amongst the soft green pods of a kind of poplar the chafers were buzzing, and numbers of their little brown bodies were strewn all over the path.

Presently he passed a bench where a girl sat putting together some sketching materials. A puff of the wind whirled her sketch to the ground; Harz ran to pick it up. She took it from him with a bow, but, as he was turning away, tore the sketch across.

"Ah!" he said; "why did you do that? It wasn't hurt."

She stood with a bit of the torn sketch in either hand; slight and very straight, with a face earnest and mobile, irregular yet serene. Suddenly her large greenish-gray eyes gazed at him with a clear look, her lips and chin set rather defiantly, her brow tranquil and reasonable.

"Why?" she repeated, "because I don't like it."

"I am a painter, will you let me look at it?"

"It isn't worth looking at, but you can if you like."

He put the two halves of the sketch carefully together, and studied it, chin in hand, and with his eyebrows moving perpetually.

"You see," she said at last, "I told you so."

Harz did not answer, but continued to look at the sketch. The girl made a dent in her cheek with the end of her brush and puckered her brows.

Harz asked suddenly:

"Why do you paint? What is it you have in your mind to do?"

She coloured, and said,

"Show me what is wrong."

"I cannot show you what is wrong, there is nothing wrong—but why do you paint?"

"I don't understand," she said.

Harz shrugged his shoulders.

"You've no business to do that," said the girl quickly, in a hurt voice, "I want to know."

Harz became suddenly excited.

"I beg your pardon!" he said. "But look! this is what's wrong, your *heart* is not in it. How will you show the truth if your heart is not in it?"

She looked at him, startled, then her eyes regained their thoughtfulness.

"Yes," she said quietly, "I suppose that *is* it. There are so many other things——"

"There is nothing else," cried Harz, "nothing but your work——"

She broke in: "I don't want always to think of myself. Suppose——"

"Suppose!" said Harz, harshly, "you haven't any work! Suppose you don't care about living a real life. Ah, then! But it's not possible—you—excuse me!" he bowed, "you do not look like that."

The girl confronted him, with her head down. He noticed the quick movements of her hands.

"Show the truth!" she said. "What did you mean by that?"

He hesitated.

"I know what you meant," she went on, looking straight into his eyes. "You meant that if it does not matter enough to hurt one badly, one had better not do it at all. I don't know if you are right—I think you are."

A nervous cough sounded behind them. Miss Naylor stepping forward, shyly offered her hand; Greta, with a flushed face and a bunch of wild flowers, stared intently. Scruff, approaching, sniffed; decided that he knew Harz, and elevating his muzzle, made a remark.

Miss Naylor broke through her embarrassment.

"We wondered if you would still be here, Christian, I am sorry to interrupt you—I was not aware that you knew Mr—Herr—"

"Harz," said Alois; "we talked — we were talking—" he stammered.

"About my sketch," said the girl, into whose ear Greta was whispering: "Will you come and have breakfast with *us* to-day; it's our turn, you know," and she smiled.

Harz, glancing at his dusty clothes, began excuses.

Greta said suddenly in a pleading voice:

"You shall come! See! Scruff likes you. It is so dull when there is nobody for breakfast but us."

Miss Naylor's mouth was twisted by a coming rebuke, which Harz hurriedly intercepted:

"Thank you," he said, "I will come with pleasure; you do not mind my being dirty?"

"Oh no!" replied Greta with haste, "we do not mind; then we shall none of us wash, and afterwards I shall show you my rabbits."

Miss Naylor, moving from one foot to the other, like a bird on its perch, suddenly broke out:

"I hope you won't regret it, it won't be a very good meal—but the girls are so impulsive—such an informal invitation; of course we shall be very glad—if you like porridge."

Greta shrugged up her shoulders, giving soft pulls at her sister's sleeves. Christian gathered her things and led the way. The silence of anxiety had fallen upon Miss Naylor.

Harz followed in a state of amazement; nothing of this kind had ever come into his life. He kept glancing shyly at the girls' figures, and, meeting the speculative innocence of Greta's eyes, he twinkled broadly. At the end of five minutes they came to two great poplar trees, which stood like sentinels one on each side of an entrance; an unweeded gravel walk led through lilac-bushes to a house, painted a dull pink, with green-shuttered windows, and a roof of greenish slate. Over the door in faded crimson letters were the words, "Villa Rubein."

"That is the way to the stables," said Greta, pointing down a path to a wall on the top of which some pigeons were sunning themselves, "where Uncle Nic keeps his horses, you know; they are called Countess and Cuckoo—his horses are always called with a C, it is because of Chris—I think they are very beautiful. He says he can drive them to Kingdom Come and they would not turn their hairs; that is what he says—but I don't know what he means. And this is where you shall bow and say 'Good morning' to our house—like that;" she dropped a little curtsey just under the faded inscription. Harz took his hat off with a laugh.

"That's nice, Greta," said Christian thoughtfully. "Did you think of it by yourself?"

"Father said that all strangers should, and I think it brings luck." She looked down at them from the doorstep as if she were going to cry, then, like a foal that flings up its heels, ran into the house and threw open a door.

A broad and thick-set man, with stiff hair brushed back from his forehead, a short, bushy brown beard parted into two at the chin, a fresh complexion and blue glasses across his thick nose, came suddenly out of a room to the right, and called out in a bluff voice:

"Ha! my good dears, kiss me quick—prrrt! Does it go well this morning? Has it been a good walk?" The sound followed of many loud and rapid kisses.

"Ha, Fräulein, good!" He had become aware

of Harz standing sheepishly in the doorway. "*Una der Herr?*" he said.

Miss Naylor explained hurriedly.

"Good, an artist! *Kommen Sie herein*, I am delighted. You will breakfast? I too—yes, yes, my good dears—I too breakfast with you this morning. I have the appetite of the hunter."

Harz looked keenly at him, perceived that he was of about his own height, but stouter, middle-aged, dressed in a loose holland jacket, and a very white, very well starched shirt, with a blue silk sash round the waist; that he looked very clean, had an air of belonging to society, and exhaled a really fine aroma of excellent cigars and the best hair-dresser's essence.

The room they entered was long and rather bare; there was a huge map on the wall, and below it a pair of globes on crooked supports with the toes turned out, resembling two highly inflated frogs erect upon their hind legs. In one corner stood a cottage piano, close to it a writing table was heaped with books and papers, odds and ends; this nook, sacred to Christian, was somehow foreign to the rest of the room, which was arranged with supernatural neatness. A table was laid for breakfast, and the warm air came in through long windows.

The meal went merrily; it was a psychological fact that Herr Paul von Morawitz was never in such good spirits as when at table. He let flow an unfailing stream of words; conversed genially with Harz, discussing art in a tone that implied, "One

does not pretend to be a connoisseur—no, no, *pas si bête*—still one has a little knowledge, not much, but a little, *que Diable!*" He recommended a man in the town, who sold cigars that were "not so very bad." He consumed a great deal of porridge, and ate nearly the whole of an omelette; now and then he bent across to Greta and gave her a sounding kiss on the check, saying, "Prrrt! Kiss me quick!"—an expression he had picked up from a London music-hall song, and for some reason considered *chic*. He asked after his daughters' plans for the day, holding out a spoonful of porridge to the terrier, who came, and refused it with a sniff of disgust. At the end of the breakfast he said brusquely:

"Well, and here is a gentleman who does not even know our names—come!" and looked suddenly at Miss Naylor. She flushed as if guilty of hopeless impropriety, and began a process of introduction in breathless periods. Herr Paul puffed out his rather thick lips. "Good!—good!" he said. "Now we know each other;" and, brushing up the ends of his moustachios with his fingers, carried Harz off into another room. It was garnished with pipe-racks, prints of dancing girls, spittoons, comfortable chairs highly seasoned by cigar smoke, and a litter of newspapers and novels.

The household at the Villa Rubein was of a curious nature. The house, cut on both floors by long corridors, fell into four divisions, each of which had its separate inhabitants, an arrangement which had come about in the following manner. . . .

When old Nicholas Treffry died, his estate upon the boundary of South Devon and Cornwall was sold and divided amongst his three surviving children—Nicholas, much the eldest, a partner in a firm of merchants in London ; Constance, who had married a planter called Decie : and Margaret, at the time of her father's death engaged to the curate of the parish, John Devorell, a Devonshire man, who shortly afterwards obtained by interest a rectorship in his own county. By his marriage with Miss Treffry he had one child called Christian. John Devorell came into money, died, and left it unreservedly to his widow. Three years afterwards, when Christian was six years old, Mrs Devorell, still young and pretty, went to live in London at her brother's house. It was there she met Paul von Morawitz—the last of an old Czech family, who had lived for three hundred years on their estates near Budweiss. Paul had been left an orphan at ten years old, and without an ancestral acre of any kind. Instead of acres, he had inherited the conviction that nothing was too good for a von Morawitz. In later years, from the standpoint of a man of the world, he professed to laugh at it, but it remained with him all the same. The absence of acres was of no great consequence, for through his mother, the daughter of a Viennese banker, he came into a well-nursed fortune. It befitted a von Morawitz that he should go into the Cavalry, but, unshaped for soldiering, he soon left the service ; some said he had a difference with his Commanding Officer upon the quality of food pro-

vided during some manœuvres; others that he had retired because he could not get chargers to fit his legs, which were indeed rather round. In any event he retired.

He had an excellent appetite for pleasure; to be a man about town suited him. He went a genial, unreflecting, expensive way with gusto in Vienna, in Paris, in London. He had an exclusive affection for those three towns, and boasted that he was as much at home in one of them as in another. As a young man, he combined an exuberant effervescence of vitality with an aristocratic fastidiousness of palate, and devoted both of them to acquiring a special knowledge of women, wines, and tobacco; above all things he was endowed with an admirable digestion. He was thirty when Mrs Devorell met him—so very different from anybody she had ever encountered in her quiet life, that his novelty fascinated her; people more dissimilar were perhaps never mated. To him, accustomed to the stage door, a freshness, a serene tranquillity, a manifest purity, were the baits—these and perchance the possession of this world's goods. Be that as it may, he was without doubt fond of her; his heart was soft, he developed to his character a domestic side.

One child, Greta, was born a year after their marriage. The instinct of "freedom" was, however, not wholly extinguished in Paul; he became a gambler. Retaining his digestion, he lost the remainder of his fortune without being greatly disturbed. He began to lose his wife's fortune—

things became difficult. Not too much remained, when Nicholas Treffry stepped in, and caused his sister to make a settlement on her daughters, retaining the income for her own life, and the power of leaving that income to Paul for his. Paul had lost his supplies; he gave up cards. The instinct of "freedom" drove him to drink; he was never grossly drunk, and rarely quite sober. His wife sorrowed over this new passion; her health, already much enfeebled, broke down. The doctors sent her to the Tyrol. She seemed to benefit, and took a lease of the Villa Rubein. The following year, when Greta was barely ten, she died. It was a shock to Paul. He gave up excessive drinking, became an inveterate smoker, and lent full rein to the domestic side of his character. He was fond of both the girls, without attempting to understand them, but Greta, his own daughter, was naturally his favourite. They remained at the Villa Rubein; it was cheap, and money, since Paul had become housekeeper, scarce.

Not long after his wife's death her sister, Mrs Decie, whose husband had died in Ceylon, returned to England; Paul wrote and invited her to live with them. She came; she had her own rooms, her own servant; the arrangement suited Paul, it was economical, and there was someone at hand to look after the girls. In truth he began to feel the necessity of occasional freedom; it was pleasant to be able to run over to Vienna now and then for a few days; to play piquet at the little club, of which he was the shining light; in a word, to go a

little "upon the tiles." One could not always mourn for a woman, even if she were an angel; moreover, he had retained his digestion.

The inhabitant of the fourth quarter of the Villa was his brother-in-law, Nicholas Treffry, whose annual sojourn out of his native land was a perpetual source of surprise to himself. Between him and his niece, Christian, there existed a rare sympathy; one of those affections between young and old, which, born mysteriously, like everything in life, seems to either the one end and aim until something different speaks in the younger heart.

Since a very severe illness he had been ordered to winter abroad, and at the commencement of each spring he would appear at Villa Rubein, driving his own horses and carriage by easy stages from Nervi, where he spent the coldest months. He generally stayed till June before he went back to London and his club, and during all that time he let no day pass in which he did not butt at foreigners, their habits, food, drink, or raiment, with a kind of "big dog" butting that hurt nobody. The illness had broken him down, he was nearly seventy, and looked more. His servant was a Luganese named Dominique, an overworked and saturnine hotel waiter, whom Mr Treffry had engaged with the caution, "Look—here! D-dominique, I swear sometimes." To which Dominique, dark of feature, ironical, and devoted, had replied, "*Bon! M'Sieu!*"

CHAPTER III

HARZ and his host sat in leather chairs; Herr Paul's square back was wedged into a cushion; his round legs crossed. Both had lighted cigars, and eyed each other furtively, as men of totally different stamp do when first thrown together. The artist found the other a new type, and studied him eagerly; but in spite of this alertness, perhaps indeed because of it, he seemed both shy and awkward. Herr Paul, on the other hand, quite at his ease, was thinking indolently, "A good-looking fellow—comes of the people, I expect, not at all the manner of the world; I wonder what he can talk about."

Presently Harz got up, and began to look at a photograph on the wall.

"Ah!" said Herr Paul in German, "That *was* a woman, they are not to be found like that in these days. She *could* dance, the little Coralie. Did you ever see such arms too? Confess it's a beautiful face, *Hein?*"

'It's a fine type," Harz admitted cordially; "quite a Titian type, look at the line of her chin and neck! Very fine that!"

Herr Paul took his cigar from his mouth, and blowing out a cloud of smoke, stared through it at the other.

"Fine?" he repeated in a dubious voice; "certainly, she was fine all over," and began suddenly without apparent reason to talk of something else. He had dropped his smoked eyeglasses; his full, brown eyes, with the little crowsfeet at the corners, were fixed alternately on his visitor and the cigar he held out in a podgy hand. Harz thought, "He's like a clean, respectable satyr! Put vine leaves in his hair, paint him asleep, with his hands crossed so! A psychological picture!" and felt inclined to laugh; but suddenly a word attracted his attention.

"When they tell me a man has individuality," Herr Paul was saying in a rich and husky voice, "I know what to expect—boots that bulge, and an umbrella of the wrong colour; he will surely be a creature of 'bad form' as they say in England; some days he will shave and some days he will not shave; some days he will smell of indiarubber, some days he will not smell. One can never tell anything about him—very discouraging!"

Harz said shortly, "You do not approve of individuality?"

Herr Paul crossed his hands. "Not if it means doing, or thinking, as those who know better do not do, or think."

"And who are those that know better?"

"Ah! my dear, you ask me a riddle? Well then! Society—Men of birth, men of a recognised position, men who are above eccentricity, who are —in a word—of repute," he ended with genial

exuberance. But Harz astonished him by jumping out of his chair.

"Men, who are flat and flat—who haven't the courage for an idea of their own, not even the courage to smell of indiarubber; men who have no desires, and so can spend all their time in making themselves flat."

Herr Paul drew out a red silk handkerchief, and carefully wiped his beard and moustaches.

"I assure you, my dear," he said; "it is easier to be flat; it is more respectable to be flat. *Himmel!* why not be flat, then?"

"Like any common fellow!"

"Exactly! Like any common fellow—like me, *par exemple!*" and Herr Paul blandly waved his hand. When he exercised an unusual amount of what he believed to be tact, he always made use of a French expression.

Harz flushed. Herr Paul followed up his victory. "Come! come!" he said. "Pass me my men of repute! *que Diable*, we are not socialists, you know. Pass me my——!" he turned to his guest with the air of a dancing master introducing a new step: "*Hein?*" he ejaculated, for Harz had given a soft moan and his eyes had disappeared, he seemed to be laughing. Herr Paul slowly crimsoned, he looked pathetic and fiercely twisted his moustaches.

"You laugh?" he said.

"Pardon!" gasped Harz: "a thousand pardons! I am very rude, it is nothing—just a thought"—and he struggled for gravity. Herr Paul stared unhappily: "Umph!" he grunted.

The door was opened; a big rumbling voice remarked: "Morning, Paul!" Harz saw a tall figure standing in the doorway.

"Come in! come in!" called Herr Paul recovering: "we will all have a drink. Let me present you to a new acquaintance, an artist: Herr Harz—my brother-in-law. Psumm! introducing is dry work." The two men shook hands; Herr Paul came back to them with foaming glasses of beer.

"Not for me, thank y'," said Mr Treffry. "By George! I wish I could! They won't let me t-touch it." He walked over to the window with a heavy tread, which, like his voice, had a tremble in it. The only way to describe his walk is to say that he moved like the hind legs of an elephant. He was a very tall man (it was said, with the usual exaggeration of family tradition, that there never had been a male Treffry under six feet), but now he stooped heavily from the shoulders, and had grown stout. There was something unobtrusively vast about his personality; he was emphatically a *big* man.

He had on a loose, brown velvet jacket, and a waistcoat, cut very low to show a frilled shirt and narrow, black ribbon tie: a thin gold chain was looped round his neck and fastened to the watch in his fob. His features were heavy, his cheeks clean-shaven, there were folds in them, rather like those in a bloodhound's face. He wore big, drooping, yellowish-grey moustaches which he had a habit of sucking in with his lower lip, and a goatee beard covered his chin. He had long, loose ears

that might almost be said to flap. On his head was a soft, black felt hat, with large brim and low crown. His grey eyes, heavy lidded, twinkled from under bushy brows with a kind of mild cynicism. As a young man he had been a sower of wild oats, he had also worked hard, and had made a good deal of money in his business; he had, in fact, consistently burnt the candle at both ends; but his hands had always been ready to pull a man up by the collar, and he had preferred to keep them clean. He had a passion for driving, and a recklessness which had gained for him in London, where it is difficult to achieve distinction, the soubriquet of the "notorious Treffry."

It was related that once, when he was driving tandem down a steep hill with very loose reins, the friend by his side had said: "For all the good you're doing with those reins, Treffry, you might as well throw them on the horses' necks."

"Just as soon," said Treffry, and he did; at the bottom of the hill they went over a low wall into a potato patch. It is related that Treffry broke his collar bone, while the friend went unharmed.

He was a great sufferer, but so constitutionally averse to being pitied, that he had contracted a habit of humming, and this, combined with the shake in his voice, and the occasional use of an obscure west-countryism, rendered him at times a subject for intuition rather than intelligence.

"I sa-ay, Paul," he said, wandering erratically about the room, and humming to himself like an intoxicated bumble-bee; "that Swiss man of yours

is an awful b-beast—he began playing his p-pipe under my window at f-five o'clock this morning. I had to ring up Dominique to empty a jug of water on the fellow's head ; it's no joke, I can tell you."

A clock on the writing table began striking twelve. Harz muttered an excuse, held out his hand to his host, bowed to Mr Treffry and went out of the room. He caught sight of Greta's face flattened against the window, and waved his hand to her. In the road he almost ran into Dawney, who was turning in between the two poplars with his head in the air, and his thumbs hooked in their favourite position, the armholes of his waistcoat.

" Hallo ! " said the latter.

" Doctor ! " returned Harz slyly ; " the fates were too much for me."

" Serves you right," said Dawney, " for your beastly egotism ; you might stand here till I come out, I shan't be more than an hour."

Harz shook his fist, and went on. A long cart drawn by cream-coloured oxen was passing slowly in the direction of the bridge. In front of the brushwood piled upon it two peasant women were sitting with their feet on a mat of grass. He watched it, a demure study in cream and brown, green and lilac, disappear in the dip on the other side, then walked on as fast as he could, taking the road round by the town. He was vexed with himself. " Here I am," he thought, " wasting my time ! in two months I've done next to nothing. Better get back to London ; have a

look at the *Salons* on the way." But his mind ran continually upon the girl he had met that morning on the river wall. He decided that she was not beautiful exactly, only very sympathetic—she looked as if she could understand. The brow pleased him with its dark brown hair softly turned back, the eyes too were straight and shining, they gave him a good feeling. The sisters—he reflected —were very different, the little one's face was as mysterious as it was innocent; the other's seemed clear as crystal. What a fine study they would make together! . . .

He had entered the town now, and was crossing the *Dom Platz*, out of which arcaded streets branched in all directions, exuding a peculiar and pungent odour of cows and leather, smoke and drains. The sound of rapid wheels over the stones made him turn his head. A carriage drawn by silver-roan horses was passing swiftly along the lower side of the *Platz*. People were staring at it, standing stock-still, and even looking slightly alarmed, as it swung from side to side and turned a corner. Harz had time to see Mr Treffry in a long whitey-brown dust coat, sitting with bent back on the driving seat, and touching the horses' flanks lightly with his whip, while his Italian servant, perched behind, clutched the rail of the seat, a nervous grin on his dark face.

"Certainly," he thought, "there's no getting away from Villa Rubein this morning — these people, they are everywhere," and he shook his head. In his studio he began sorting his sketches,

washing his brushes, and dragging out things he had accumulated during his two months' stay. He even began to unloop the blanket hanging over the entrance. He decided that he was throwing away his time, made a resolve to be off, and felt very discontented. The idea of Paris and the *Salons* gave him little pleasure. What should he do with his picture of the river?

Perhaps the "man of repute" would buy it!

He looked at it.

"I wouldn't sell it to him! I'll keep it; Dawney will take care of it for me. When I get to London I'll send for it."

He took his palette and set to work touching up a sketch. Suddenly he threw down his brush: "Those two girls! Why not try? What a picture! just the two heads, the sky, and leaves —call it Spring. I'll begin to-morrow. Where? Against this window—there'll be difficulty; better at the Villa. I'll get the canvas to-day. . ." He had a feeling of alert and happy self-confidence that made him smile to himself.

CHAPTER IV

THE wind, stirring and rustling amongst trees and bushes, flung the young leaves skywards. The trembling of their silver linings was like a flutter of joy at some message of good news. It was one of those spring mornings when everything seems full of sweet restlessness — soft clouds chasing across the sky, soft scents mingling and dying away, the notes of birds, now too shrill and sweet, now hushed in long silences—when all nature is striving for something, and nothing seems quite in its place.

The Villa Rubein alone withstood the influence of the day, it wore its usual look of contented isolation. Harz sent in his card, and asked to see Herr von Morawitz. The servant, a grey-eyed, intelligent-looking Swiss, with no hair on his face, and a pleasant smile, came back to say that his master was in the garden.

Harz followed him down the passage.

Herr Paul, a small, white flannel cap on his head, gloves on his hands, and his sun-glasses across his nose, was turning a hose on to some rose bushes, and humming an air from "Faust."

The appearance of this side of the house was very different. The sun fell upon it; and over a verandah creepers clung and scrambled in long

green scrolls. There was a lawn with freshly mown grass, flower beds laid out, and at the end of an avenue of young acacias an arbour, built of trellis work and covered with wisteria.

In the east mountain peaks, like fingers of snow, were glittering above the mist. A tender and grave simplicity lay upon the landscape; upon roofs and spires, upon valleys and dreamy hill-sides with, here, a yellow scar showing in their purple bloom, there, a cascade, like the tail of a grey horse swishing in the wind.

Herr Paul came forward holding out his hand.

"Delighted to see you," he said, "what can we do for you?"

Harz answered that he had come to beg the young ladies to sit to him for a picture: "I have the canvas, I bring everything—there shall be no trouble for them. I paint them here in the garden when they have nothing else to do." Herr Paul was secretly taken aback, he had not forgotten his previous day's discomfort; ever since he had been thinking: "A queer bird that!—thinks a lot of himself too!" He looked at Harz, and suddenly felt convinced that it would save trouble if the refusal came from another quarter.

"With all the pleasure, my dear," he said expansively, glancing through his sun-glasses with a dubious eye: "let us ask the girls;" and putting down his hose, he led the way towards the arbour, sonorously singing "La Parlate d'amor"; and thinking: "You'll be disappointed, my young conqueror, or I'm much mistaken."

Miss Naylor and the two girls were sitting in the shade of the arbour; Christian reading aloud one of La Fontaine's fables, and Greta, one eye upon her governess, who was knitting with her back turned, stealthily cutting a pig out of orange peel. They all stopped when the men came up, and shook hands with their visitor.

"Ah! my dear dears!" began Herr Paul, who in the presence of Miss Naylor always paraded his English: "Here is our friend, who has a very flattering request to make of you; he would paint you, yes—both together *al fresco*, in the beautiful air, in the sunshine, with the birds, with the little birds." He pulled Greta's hair; who was gazing at Harz, flushing a deep pink, and furtively showing him her pig.

Christian, said quickly: "Paint us? Oh, no!" Suddenly she saw Harz looking at her, and said, rather irritably: "If you really wish, I suppose we can—" then dropped her eyes again on her book.

"Ah!" said Herr Paul, raising his eyebrows so that his glasses fell off his nose: "and what says Gretchen? does she want to be handed up to posterities a little peacock along with the other little birds?"

Greta, who had continued staring at Harz, said slowly, "Yes—of course—I—want—to—be."

"Prrt!" said Herr Paul, and looked for help at Miss Naylor, who gave a little hop, and opened her mouth—but all that came out was a tiny squeak, as sometimes happens when one is anxious to speak, and has not arranged what to say.

The affair was concluded ; Harz gave a sigh of satisfaction, he had set his heart on this picture. But Herr Paul had still a card to play.

"There is your Aunt," he said ; "there are things to be considered—one must certainly ask her, we shall see," and, after kissing Greta loudly on both cheeks, he went off towards the house.

"Why do you want to paint us so?" asked Christian, the moment he was gone.

"I think it very wrong," blurted out Miss Naylor suddenly.

"Why?" said Harz, frowning and turning sharply to her.

"Greta is so young ; there are lessons!—it is such a waste of time."

His eyebrows twitched. "Ah! you think so!" he said.

"I don't see why it is a waste of time," said Christian quietly ; "there are lots of hours when we sit out here and do nothing."

"And it is very dull," put in Greta, with a pout.

"You are rude, Greta," said Miss Naylor in a fine little rage of her own, pursing her lips together, and taking up her knitting.

"I think it seems always rude to speak the truth," said Greta, philosophically.

Miss Naylor looked at her in a concentrated manner, which with her expressed the acmé of displeasure.

At this moment a servant came with a message to Harz that Mrs Decie would be glad to see him ;

and as he went he could hear Miss Naylor's voice fulminating jerkily behind him. He felt depressed, angry, out of tune ; his self-love had been wounded. Across the verandah, through an open window hung with silk curtains he entered a rather dark room. This was Mrs Decie's sanctum, where she conducted her correspondence, received her visitors, read the latest literature, and sometimes, when she had bad headaches, lay for hours upon the sofa with a fan, and her eyes closed. There was always a scent of sandal-wood, a suggestion of the East, a kind of mysteriousness, as if things, like tables and chairs, were not really what they seemed to be, but something infinitely less commonplace.

The visitor looked twice to be quite sure of anything ; there were many plants, long curtains of beads, a great deal of silverwork and china.

Mrs Decie came forward with the slight rustle of silk which—whether it was in or out of fashion —always accompanied her ; a tall woman, over fifty, who moved as if she had been gently tied together at the knees. Her face was long, with a fine, broad brow, from which her sandy-grey hair was waved severely back ; she had pale eyes, and a perpetual, pale, and enigmatic smile on her lips. Her complexion had been ruined by her long sojourn in Ceylon, and might be unkindly described as fawn-coloured. She came close to Harz, and kept her eyes fixed upon his, with her head bent slightly forward.

" We are so pleased to know you, Herr Harz," she said, speaking in a voice which had lost its

ring. "It is most charming to find someone in these parts who can help us to remember that there is such a thing as art. We had Mr C—— here last autumn, such a nice fellow." She named an English painter of some reputation, whose pictures Harz detested. "He was so interested in the native customs and dresses. You are a subject painter too, I think? Won't you sit down?"

She went on speaking for a minute or two, introducing the names of several painters, asking him questions, and skating round the edge of what was personal. He thought: "She wants to know whether I'm worth powder and shot," and smiled, feeling all at once in a thoroughly good humour.

"You wish to paint my nieces, I hear?" Mrs Decie began again, leaning back on a settee, and crossing her knees.

"I wish to have that honour," he said, with a bow.

"And what sort of picture did you think of?"

Harz smiled: "That," he said, "is in the future, I couldn't tell you"; and he thought, "Will she ask me if I get my tints in Paris, like the woman who interviewed Tramper?" He could not take his eyes off her face, where the perpetual, pale smile seemed to invite his confidence, yet to warn him that his words would be sucked in somewhere behind that fine brow, and carefully sorted. Mrs Decie was in fact thinking: "An interesting-looking young man, a regular Bohemian — no harm in that with a little training; something Napoleonic about his face; I daresay he has no dress clothes. Yes, I should like to see more

of him." She had a fine eye for the points of a celebrity, and though his name was perfectly unfamiliar to her, and would indeed have been scouted by Mr C——, that famous artist, she was aware of a certain magnetism in him. To do her justice, she was one of those born "lion" finders who discover the animal for their own pleasure, and not for the glory it brings them; moreover, she had the courage of her instincts—a leonine atmosphere was necessary, but she trusted to her own divination to secure it; nobody could foist a "lion" upon her.

"I think it will be delightful," she said at last; and Harz knew that his point had been gained, but was left quite ignorant as to what she really thought about the matter, which rather tickled the irony in him.

"You will stay and have lunch with us?" said Mrs Decie: "the arrangements here are rather peculiar. We are such a mixed household, you see, but there is always lunch at two o'clock for the girls, and for any one who likes, and we all dine together at seven. You would have your sittings in the afternoons, perhaps? I should so like to see your sketches. You are using the old house on the wall for a studio; so original of you!"

But Harz excused himself from staying. He asked if he might come in the afternoon, and begin work. In truth, he felt a little suffocated by the sandal-wood and the sympathy of this sphynx-like woman.

He walked home along the wall. The singing of larks and thrushes, the rush of the water, and the humming of the chafers sounded good. He had succeeded; he would do something with this, something that would live, something great. He was still at the beginning of fame, this picture should make him! Before his eyes the faces of the two girls kept starting up, framed against the sky, with young leaves fluttering against their cheeks.

CHAPTER V

THREE mornings later, Greta came along the river dyke and established herself upon a bench from which she could watch the old house. She had not been there long before Harz appeared suddenly through the outer door.

"I did not knock," she said: "because you would not have heard, and it is so early, so I have been waiting for you a whole quarter of an hour."

She held some flowers in her hand; out of them she selected a rosebud, and handed it to him solemnly. "That is my first rosebud this year," she said, flushing: "and it is for you because you are painting my picture. To-day I am thirteen, Herr Harz: there is not to be any sitting, because it is my birthday; but instead we are all going to Meran to see the play of Andreas Hofer. You are also to come; I am here to tell you, and the others shall come directly." He bowed.

"And who are the others?"

"Christian, and Dr Edmund, and Miss Naylor, and Cousin Teresa. Her husband is ill, you know, so she is sad, but to-day she is going to forget that. It is not good to be always sad, is it, Herr Harz?"

He laughed.

"With you I think it would not be possible."

Greta answered with grave decision:

"Yes, with me it would be quite possible, because I too am often sad; but I think you are making fun. You are not to make fun to-day, it is my birthday. Do you think it is nice to grow up?"

"No, Fräulein Greta, it is better to have all the time before you." He walked along at her side.

"I think," said Greta, "you are very much afraid of losing time. Chris says that time is nothing."

"Time is everything," replied Harz, with vehemence.

"She says that time is nothing, and thought is everything," pursued Greta, twisting a flower, with her grave eyes immoveably upon him; "but *I* think that you cannot have a thought unless you have time to think it in. Look! there are the others!"

A little cluster of sunshades swaying round the turn of the road glowed for a moment, then was lost in shadow.

"Come," said Harz, with a feeling of impatience; "let us get on to the station."

Under Schloss Tirol people were streaming across the meadows to an open theatre. There were tall fellows in mountain dress, with short leather jackets, bare knees, and eagle-plumed hats; fruit-sellers; burghers and their families; mountebanks; actors; visitors. The audience, packing into the enclosure of high boards, sweltered under the heat of a brilliant sun. Cousin Teresa, tall and thin, with hard,

red cheeks and pleasant eyes, shaded them with her hand, and called plaintively for a fan. She had lost her parasol on the way, and Dawney, who sat next, made a shield for her with his straw hat.

"I don't care tuppence for the sun," he said, untruly, in his deliberate voice: "besides, it's too much to my interest that you should get a sunstroke."

The play began, an epitome of the Tyrolese risings of 1809. Village life, dances, yodelling; oppression and murmuring; exhortation, beat of drum; the gathering, with flint-locks, pitchforks, knives; battle and victory; the home-coming, the cries of children; festival; gathering again, the roar of cannon, betrayal, capture, death; always in front, black bearded, leathern girdled, the figure of Hofer. It was played under the sky, against a background of mountains.

Harz and Christian were sitting just behind the others. She wanted to ask him questions, but he seemed so intent upon the play that she did not like to. She watched his face stealthily; it was rigid with a kind of cold excitement; he seemed carried away, transported into the life that was passing before their eyes. Something of his feeling seized upon her too, and when the play came to an end she was trembling. In pushing their way out through the crowd, they became separated from the others.

"There's a short cut to the station here," said Christian; "can't we go this way?"

The path rose a little ; a narrow stream crept along the meadow beneath, and above, on the other side, wild roses, like stars, spangled the hedge. She had a feeling that was more than curiosity. She wanted to know why he was so moved. For the last few days, since their meeting upon the river wall, the girl's thoughts had been restless. This stranger, with his keen face, insistent eyes, and abrupt energy, had seemed to put before her a thing, pressing, strange, and curiously necessary ; his words had embodied something latent in her own mind, something very real ; she did not know what it was, but she recognised that it was inseparable from him and his strenuous personality.

He was silent, and she could not find the courage to begin. They came to a stile, and Christian stood aside to make way for some peasant boys, all dusty and rough haired, who whistled and sang as they swung by.

"I was like those boys once," said Harz. Christian turned quickly to him.

"Oh," she said ; "that was why you felt the play."

He nodded. "It's my country up there. I was born in the mountains. I looked after the cows like those fellows, and slept in hay-cocks, and cut the trees in the winter. I worked as hard as any of them. All the same they called me 'black sheep' and 'loafer' in my village."

"Why?"

"Because I wanted to get away. Do you

think I could have stayed here like that all my life?"

Christian's eyes grew eager.

"If people don't understand what it is you want to do they call you 'loafer,'" he muttered.

"But you did it in spite of them," she said with quiet triumph. For herself it was so hard to decide, or to finish anything. As a child she had been fond of telling herself stories. When she told them to Greta, the latter, whose instinct was always for the definite, would say: "*Und was kam am Ende*, Chris? Do finis' it dies morning;" but Christian never could. Her thoughts were deep, vague, dreamy, invaded by both sides of the question. Whatever she did, were it needlework, verse-making, or painting, had a charm of its own; but it was not always what it was intended for at the beginning. Nicholas Treffry had once said of her, "When Chris starts out to trim a hat, it may be an altar-cloth or a Japanese print at the end, but you may bet it won't be a ha-at." It was her instinct to look for the meaning of things, and to such people decision comes hardest. She unconsciously knew more of her own nature, more of the values and essence of life, than most girls of nineteen, but it was the knowledge of reason alone, and in the rounded security of her existence, her heart was unruffled, except by rare fits of passion—tantrums, Nicholas Treffry called them—at what seemed mean or unjust. . . . She clasped her hands, a trick she had when trying to express a new thought.

"If I were a man," she said, "and going to be

great, I would have wanted to begin at the very lowest."

"Yes," said Harz quickly; "one must be able to feel *everything*."

Quaintly, neither was conscious that he had appropriated the greatness. He went on, a smile twisting his mouth unpleasantly under its thin line of dark moustache.

"There are not many people who agree with you; it is a crime not to have been born with plenty of money."

She looked at him for the first time.

"That is a sneer," she said; "I didn't think *you* would have sneered."

"It is true in your society. What is the use of pretending that it isn't?"

"It may be true, but perhaps it is finer not to say it."

"By Heaven!" said Harz, striking one hand into the other, "if there were more truth spoken there would not be so much of that meanness."

Christian had seated herself on the stile; her eyes were fixed upon him from under her shady hat. The sunset clouds were trailing along the mountains; here and there a patch of snow glowed pink with their reflection.

"You are right all the same, Fräulein Christian," he said suddenly; "that is a very little business. Work is what matters—ah! to see the beauty in everything."

Christian's face changed. She understood that craving for beauty; but it was not his words that

moved her, it was the contact for the first time with something uncompromising. She slipped down from the stile and drew a deep breath.

"I wonder!" she said, and walked on. Neither spoke for some time, and then Harz said, diffidently:

"If you and Fräulein Greta would ever like to come and see my studio, I would be so happy. I would try and make it clean for you."

Christian raised her eyes and answered simply:

"I should like to come. I could learn something. I want to learn."

She relapsed into silence; but Harz kept thinking of the words. They seemed to him to have some subtle significance he could not explain, which brought her nearer to him.

The path came suddenly to an end at the road.

"We must be in front of the others—it's nice to be in front of people, because then one can dawdle," said Christian. "I forgot—you don't ever dawdle."

"Phew!" said Harz. "Don't I? After a big fit of work, I can dawdle faster than anybody; but all of a sudden I have to work again—can't help it, it is like wanting to eat."

"I believe I could dawdle for ever," she said.

By the roadside a peasant woman screwed up her sun-wrinkled face as they passed, and said in a low tone:

"Please, gracious lady, help me to lift up this basket."

Christian stooped, but before she had hold of it, Harz hoisted it on to his own back.

"All right," he nodded. "Forgive me, mother!"

The woman, looking relieved and ashamed, walked along by Christian's side; she kept rubbing her brown hands together, and said in a tired voice:

"Gracious lady! I would not have wished it; it is heavy, yes—but I would never have wished it; only your help to lift it a little to my back, because you too are a woman."

Christian touched her sleeve.

"He would rather carry it."

The woman wiped her face with her apron, and repeated in a penitent sing-song:

"It is not right, I would never have asked. Only to lift it a little to my back——"

They had not gone far along the road before the others drove by; Miss Naylor's face was bent forward, and her slightly horrified lips were pursed upon an expression of opinion; Cousin Teresa nodded pleasantly; back to the horses, Dawney sat, a smile curving up the corners of his mouth, and beside him Greta with a demure look upon her face.

Harz began to laugh; Christian flushed: "Why do you laugh?" she asked.

"Ah!" he said; "you English people are so afraid of each other? You must not do this here; you must not do that there; it is like sitting in a field of nettles. If I were to take off my coat to walk with you, I think that little lady would fall out of the carriage." His laugh was infectious; and they arrived at the station feeling as if they had known each other a long time.

The sun had dipped behind the mountains, when the little train steamed down the valley. All were very subdued, and Greta, with her head nodding from side to side, slumbered fitfully. Christian, in her corner, looked out of the window, and Harz kept studying her profile.

He tried to see her eyes. He had remarked that whatever the expression in them, their brows, arched and rather wide apart, gave them a peculiar look of understanding. He fell to thinking with despair of his picture. There was nothing in her face to seize upon, it was too sympathetic, too much like light. He tried to comfort himself with the obstinacy in her chin.

The train stopped with a jerk ; she looked round at him. All through the commotion of disembarkation it seemed to him as if she had been saying : " I trust you, you know ; I trust you." . . .

At Villa Rubein, Herr Paul had prepared sumptuously for Greta's *Fest.* When the whole party were assembled at table, he alone remained standing, and, waving his arm like a wand over the white cloth, cried :

" My dears ! Your happiness ! There are good things here—crackers ! Come ! " Suddenly, with a sly look and the air of a conjuror producing a rabbit, he whipped off the cover of the soup tureen: " Soup—turtle, green fat ! " and smacked his lips.

No servants were allowed in the room, because, as Greta whispered to Harz :

" It is that we are to be glad this evening."

Infectious geniality radiated from Herr Paul's

countenance, mellow like the bowl of wine in the middle of the table. He toasted everybody, and exhorted them to conviviality.

Harz passed a cracker secretly behind Greta's head, and Miss Naylor, moved by some mysterious impulse, gave it a horrified pull; it exploded, and Greta sprang up. Scruff began barking, and suddenly appeared upon a side table with his forelegs in a plate of soup; without moving them, he turned his head; and his eyes appeared to accuse everyone of his false position. It was the signal for a shriek of laughter. Mrs Decie's smile spread until, so to speak, the whole of the lower part of her face was under it. Christian went off into silent choking, which ended in little, ecstatic shrieks; and Harz, rolling in his chair, began to imitate the terrier's dismal attitude. Poor Scruff accepted his forelegs as fixtures, he made no effort to release them, and sniffed dolorously at the soup; seeing that nothing happened however, he began gingerly to lap it.

"Take him out! Oh! take him out!" wailed Greta, "he shall be ill!"

"*Allons! mon cher*," cried Herr Paul, advancing, "*c'est magnifique, mais vous savez ce n'est pas la guerre;*" but Scruff, with a wild spring, leaped past him to the ground.

"Oh!" cried Miss Naylor, "the carpet!" A fresh moan of laughter shook the table, for now that they had tasted of laughter all wanted to laugh without ceasing. When Scruff and his traces had been effaced, Herr Paul took a wine ladle in

his hand: "I have a toast," he said, waving it to ensure silence; "a toast we will drink all together from our hearts; the toast of my little daughter, dear to me, who to-day has thirteen years become; and there is also in our hearts," he continued, putting down the ladle and turning suddenly grave; "the thought of one who is not to-day with us to see this joyful occasion, and to her too, in all happiness, we turn our hearts and our glasses, because it is her joy that we should yet be joyful. I drink to my little daughter, may God her shadow bless!"

All stood up, and, clinking glasses, drank; then suddenly, in the hush that followed, Greta, according to custom, began to sing a German carol; at the end of the fourth line she stopped abashed.

Herr Paul, retiring behind his handkerchief, blew his nose loudly, but in a moment he had emerged again.

"Psss—bm—m!" he cried, and pulling a cracker with Cousin Teresa extorted from it a cap of many colours, with which he decorated his head. Everyone followed his example, Miss Naylor attaining the distinction of a pair of donkey's ears, which she put on after an extra glass of wine, with a great air of sacrifice to the public good.

At the end of supper came the moment for the offering of gifts. Herr Paul had tied a handkerchief over Greta's eyes, and one by one they brought her their presents. Greta, under forfeit of a kiss, was bound to tell the giver by the feel of the gift. Her swift, supple little hands explored

noiselessly, and in every case she was right. Dawney's present, a kitten, created a scene by getting into her hair.

"That is Dr Edmund's!" she cried at once. Christian noticed that Harz had disappeared, but suddenly he came in, red and breathless, and took his place at the end of the gift-bearers.

She looked at him.

"How good of you!" she whispered.

"Am I in time? I went home to get it."

Advancing on tiptoe, he put his present into Greta's hands. It was a miniature bronze of a Donatello statue.

"Oh! Herr Harz!" cried Greta, "I saw it in the studio that day. It stood on the table, and it is lovely."

Mrs Decie, thrusting her pale eyes close to it, murmured,

"Charming!"

Mr Treffry took it in his fingers.

"Rum little t-toad! Cost a p-pot of m-money, though," and he eyed Harz dubiously.

They all trooped into the next room, and Herr Paul, slipping the bandage from Greta's eyes, transferred it to his own.

"Take care!—take care all!" he cried, "I am a devil of a catcher," and feeling cautiously with his hands, he advanced like a bear that is going to hug. But he caught no one. Christian and Greta whisked under his arms, and left him grasping at the air. Mrs Decie slipped past with surprising agility. Mr Treffry.

smoking his cigar, barricaded himself in a corner with a chair, and jeered :

" Bravo Paul ! What an active b-beggar it is ! I sa-ay, look at his legs ! Mind your eye, Greta ! "

At last Herr Paul caught Cousin Teresa, who had flattened herself against the wall, and, losing her head, stood paralysed, uttering little shrieks.

Suddenly Mrs Decie started playing " The Blue Danube." Herr Paul dropped the handkerchief with which he had been mopping his brows. He twisted his moustache fiercely, glared round the room, and seizing Greta by the waist began to dance furiously with a bob like that of a well-regulated cork in lumpy water. Miss Naylor and Cousin Terresa followed suit, dancing completely different steps with solemn faces. Harz went up to Christian.

" I can't dance," he said, rather ashamed ; " that is, I have only danced once or twice, but I like it— if you would try with me ? "

She put her hand on his arm, and they began. She danced, light as a feather, her eyes shining, her feet flying, her body bent a little forward. At first it was not a great success, but soon the time seemed to get into his feet, and they went swinging on when the others stopped for breath. Sometimes one couple or another slipped through the window and danced on the verandah, then came whirling in again. The lamplight glowed upon the girls' white dresses and upon Herr Paul's perspiring

face. He constituted in himself a perfect orgy, and, when the music stopped, flung himself at full length upon the sofa, gasping and muttering:

"My God! but, my God!"

Harz felt giddy, and had to cling to Christian's arm.

"I could have gone on for ever!" he cried.

Glowing and panting, she looked at him; he seemed beside himself with excitement.

"*Ach!*" he said, "I dance so badly; but I will soon learn."

Greta in the centre of the room clapped her hands.

"Every evening we will dance, every evening we will dance."

Harz looked at Christian, and the colour deepened in her face.

"I will show you how they danced in my village, with the feet on the ceiling," and, running to Dawney, he cried:

"Hold me here! and lift me—like that—so! Now—one—two," he tried to hoist himself with his feet in the air, but, with a loud "Ouch!" from Dawney, they collapsed to the ground, and sat rubbing themselves and shouting with laughter. This untimely event brought the evening to an end. Dawney departed, escorting Cousin Teresa; and Harz strode home humming the tune of the waltz, and feeling still the pressure of Christian's waist against his arm.

In their room the two girls sat a little before undressing.

"Ah!" sighed Greta, "this is the happiest birthday I have had.

Christian thought:

"I have never been so happy in my life as to-day. I should like every day to be like this," and, leaning out into the night, she let the cool air blow against her cheeks.

CHAPTER VI

"CHRIS!" said Greta tentatively, one morning, some days after her *Fest*; "Miss Naylor danced last evening, I think she shall have a headache to-day, there is my French and my history this morning."

"Well! I can take them."

"That is nice," said Greta, with a joyful eye; "then we can talk. I am sorry about the headache. I shall give her my *eau de Cologne*."

Miss Naylor's headaches after dancing were indeed things to be calculated upon.

The girls carried their books to the arbour; it was a showery day, and they had to run for shelter. The sunlight struck through the raindrops with the glitter of a sword-blade. Greta shook back her hair.

"The French first, Chris." She liked French, in which she was not far inferior to Christian; the lesson proceeded in the most admirable way. At the end of an hour exactly by her watch (Mr Treffry's birthday present, lovingly admired every five minutes)—an hour, be it understood, including the time for coming out, the time for settling down, the time for breaking-up—Greta rose.

"Chris," she said solemnly, "I have forgotten to feed my rabbits."

"Be quick!" said Christian, "there isn't much time for history."

Greta vanished. Christian watched the bright drops falling one by one from the roof; her lips were parted in a smile. She was thinking of something Harz had said the night before. An argument had arisen upon the value of public opinion as a safeguard of morals and society, and Harz, after sitting silent for a long time, had suddenly burst out: "I think a single man who is in earnest is better than twenty half-hearted men who follow each other, and I say that in the end he has done more good to society." Dawney had answered: "If you had your way there would be no society—you preach: No rules! Each man his own line." "Ah," replied Harz, "there would be society, a much finer society than now; it would not live upon the weak." "Bah!" Herr Paul had chimed in: "the weak will go to the wall, you cannot help that." "Let them fall against the wall if they must," said Harz, "don't push them there. . . ."

Greta reappeared walking pensively in the rain.

"Bino," she said, with a sigh, "has eaten too much. I remember now, I *did* feed them before. *Must* we do the history, Chris?"

"Of course! I said I would take the lessons."

Greta opened her book with diligence, and put a finger in the page. "Herr Harz is very kind to me," she said. "Yesterday he brought me a bird which came into his studio with a hurt wing; he brought it very gently in his pocket-handkerchief—

he is very kind, the bird was not at all frightened of him. You did not know about that, Chris?"

Chris flushed a little, and said in rather a hurt voice:

"I don't see that it had anything to do with me."

"No," assented Greta.

The colour deepened in Christian's cheeks.

"Go on with your history, Greta."

"Only," pursued Greta, "that he always tells you everything, Chris."

"He doesn't! How can you say such things!"

"I think that he does, and it is because you do not make him angry. It is very easy to make him angry; you have only to think differently, and he shall be angry at once."

"You're a little cat," said Christian, "it isn't true. It's only that he hates shams, and can't bear meanness; and it *is* mean to cover up your dislikes and pretend to agree with people."

"Papa says that he thinks too much of himself."

"Father!" began Christian hotly, and stopped, biting her lips and turning wrathful eyes upon Greta.

"*You* do not always show your dislikes, Chris."

"I? What has that got to do with it? Because one is a coward that doesn't make it any better, does it?"

"I think it is that he has a great many dislikes," murmured Greta.

"I wish you would attend to yourself and not pry into other people," and Christian pushed away her book, gazing in front of her in uneasy anger.

A few minutes passed, and then Greta leaning over rubbed a cheek against her shoulder.

"I am very sorry, Chris—I only wanted to talk. Shall I read some history?"

"Yes," said Christian coldly.

"Are you angry with me, Chris?"

There was no answer; Greta's eyes wandered disconsolately to her book. For some five minutes there was silence, save for the patter of lingering drops; then Greta pulled her sister's sleeve.

"Look, Chris," she said, "there *is* Herr Harz!"

Christian looked up, and dropping her eyes again on the book, said: "Will you go on with the history, Greta?"

Greta sighed.

"Yes, I will—but oh, Chris, there is the luncheon gong!" and she meekly closed her book. . . .

During the weeks that followed there was a "sitting" nearly every afternoon in a corner of the garden. Miss Naylor usually attended them; the little lady, to a certain extent, was carried beyond her objections. She came to take an interest in the picture, and would furtively watch out of the corner of her eye the strokes of the painter's brush; but in her mind's depths she never got used to the vanity, the waste of time; her lips would move, her knitting needles go "click-click," in suppressed remonstrance.

It was a quality in Harz that what he did fast he did best; if he had leisure, there came a moment when he "saw too much," as the saying is; he loved his work so passionately that he did not

know where to stop; he could not bear to lay aside anything; he always thought: "I can get it better." Greta's face was finished, but with Christian's, try as he would, he could not satisfy himself; from day to day it seemed to change as if her soul were changing too. Her eyes would meet his; he thought he could read them clearly; but perhaps they spoke to him as a man, not an artist.

Dawney would often stroll out after his daily visit to Mr Treffry, to whom he was applying a "cure," and lie down on the grass with his feet crossed, arms behind neck, and a big cigar in his mouth. Greta and he were great friends, but could never meet without sparring. Tea was brought out at five o'clock, and with it Mrs Decie appeared with a magazine or a novel, for she prided herself upon her literary knowledge. The sitting was suspended; Harz, lighting a cigarette, would move between the tea-table and the picture, drinking his tea, and putting a touch in here and there; he never sat down until everything was over for the day. During these "rests" there was much talk, which always drifted into a discussion; with some people this comes as a matter of course, and Mrs Decie was one of them. She was happiest in conversations of a literary order, and would make a plentiful use of such expressions as: "After all it produces an illusion —and does anything else matter?" "Rather a '*Poseur*' is he not?" "All a matter of temperament," or, "That's a question of the definition of

words"; and other delightful generalities which sound well, and seem to go far, and are pleasingly irrefutable. Sometimes the discussion turned on a matter of art—some point of colour or technique; the justification of realism in literature, or of modern pre-Raphaelitism. Harz always found himself looking at Christian when these discussions were started. Her eyes gave him the feeling that she at all events wanted to get to the very bottom of the matter, a sort of bright reasonableness seemed to shine out of them, at times they were big and clear like stars, as if seeing truth; then dreamy, as though she were weighing the reason of it; he felt that there was nothing with which he would not entrust her. He would fidget close to his canvas while she was speaking, and try to fix the expression in her eyes, but it always eluded him, and in revenge he felt a mad inclination to paint Mrs Decie's eyes instead, pale, weary, and watchful, which above that perpetual smile seemed always to be saying: "Let us take a little intellectual exercise—though, of course, there's nothing in it."

Greta sat on the grass during the "rest," pulling Scruff's ears till he rolled his head as if the last day had come, and asked for cake in a gruff mutter. She would look from one speaker to the other in turn, and at the end of the discussion always shook herself. But sometimes no one, not even Miss Naylor, came to the sittings; and then Christian and Harz would talk with a strange sense of security, which neither attempted to analyse.

One day Christian said suddenly, looking up from her book: "What is your religion?"

He stopped in the middle of a touch on the canvas.

"I don't know—Roman Catholic, I suppose, I was baptized in that Church."

"I didn't mean that; what do you believe? Do you think there is a future life?"

Greta, who was plaiting some blades of grass, murmured:

"Christian shall always want to know what people think about a future life, that is so funny."

"How can I tell?" said Harz, "I never thought about it—I never had time."

"How can you help thinking?" said Christian, "I *have* to, it seems to me awful that we might come to an end."

She closed her book, and it slipped from her knees to the ground; she went on:

"There must be a future life, we are so incomplete. What is the good of your work? Development? But if you have to stop all of a sudden?"

"I don't know, and I don't much care; all I know is I've got to work."

"But why?" she insisted.

"I must—it's the only happiness; the only real happiness is in the fighting, the rest—the rest is nothing. Suppose you have finished a thing, does it ever satisfy you? Supposing you are looking forward, and waiting—why! it's wretched."

Christian leant back, and clasped her hands be-

hind her neck; the sunlight flickered through the leaves on to her face and the bosom of her dress.

Harz cried:

"Stay like that! I want to catch the light."

She let her eyes rest upon his face, swinging her foot a little, and knitting her brows.

"You work because you must, that isn't enough," she said; "Why do you feel that you must? I want to know what is behind. When I was travelling with Aunt Constance the winter before last, we often talked—I've heard her discuss it with her friends. I used to think her theory was right; she says we move on in circles till we reach Nirvana; she is almost a Buddhist, you know. Last winter I found I couldn't talk about it to her, it seemed as if she never really meant anything. Then I started reading—Kant and Hegel——"

"Ah!" put in Harz, with a quick shake of his head; "if they would teach me to draw better, or to see a new colour in a flower, or an expression in a face, I would read them all—but they don't."

Christian leant forward, and rested her chin on her hands:

"It *must* be right to get as near the truth as we can; every step gained must be something. You believe in truth; truth is the same thing as beauty—you said so yourself—you try to paint the truth, you always see the beauty in everything. How can we know any part of the truth, unless we know the beginning of it?"

"I—think," murmured Greta, *sotto voce*, "you

see one way—and he sees another—because—you are not the same person."

"Of course," said Christian impatiently, "but why——"

Nicholas Treffry was coming from the verandah, holding the *Times* in one hand, a huge meerschaum pipe in the other, and humming as he walked very slowly with bent knees, towards them.

"Ah-h-h!" he said to Harz, in his rumbling voice, "I am very glad to see you; how's the picture? eh-h-h?" (just as he would have asked, "How's your father? eh-h-h?"), and he lowered himself very carefully into a chair.

"Are you better to-day, Uncle?" said Christian softly.

"Oh! *I'm* all right, my dear. Confounded humbugs, those doctors. Your fa-ather used to swear by his doctor; why, that fellow killed him, he made him drink such a l-lot of stuff! He was an awful d-duffer in some ways, your fa-ather, Chris."

"Then why do you *have* a doctor, Uncle?"

Mr Treffry looked at her sideways, and his eyes twinkled.

"*I* don't know, Chris," he said, "if they get hold of you, they're beggars to hold on," and he began humming faintly to himself as he spread his paper. There had been a gentle breeze all day, but now it had quite died away, and not a leaf quivered, not a blade of grass was stirring; from the house could be heard faint sounds as of somebody playing on a pipe. A blackbird came

hopping down the path within three yards of them.

"When you were a boy, did you go bird's-nesting, Uncle Nic?" whispered Greta, with an eye on the blackbird.

"I b-believe you, Greta," said Mr Treffry, sucking in his moustache with a kind of "hsip," while the blackbird hopped into the shrubbery.

"You frightened him, Uncle Nic! Papa says that at 'Schloss König,' where he lived when he was a boy, he would be always after jackdaws' nests."

"Gammon! Greta," said Mr Treffry, and in his voice the word sounded dignified and sonorous; "your fa-ather n-never took a jackdaw's nest, his legs are too round."

"Are you fond of birds, Uncle Nic?"

"Ask me another, Greta!—well, yes; I s'pose I am."

"Then why did you go bird's-nesting? *I* think it is cruel."

Mr Treffry coughed behind his paper.

"Ah-h! there you h-have me, Greta."

Harz shut his brushes together with a click.

"That's all for to-day," he said.

"Can I have a look?" asked Mr Treffry.

"Oh! certainly."

Uncle Nic got slowly up from his chair, and stood before the picture.

"I sa-ay!" (he pointed at it with a shaky forefinger), "you've made her ra-ather long in the t-tooth."

"It isn't finished," ejaculated Harz, to whom this remark was Greek.

"When it's for sale," said Mr Treffry (one of those men whose praise must be inferred), "I should like to b-buy it."

Harz bowed, and for some reason felt annoyed, as if he had been asked to part with something very personal—he had never thought about the sale of this picture.

"I thank you," he said. A gong sounded in the house.

"You'll stay and have a snack with us, e-eh?" said Mr Treffry, "the doctor's stopping"; and gathering up his paper, he moved off towards the house with his hand on Greta's shoulder, the terrier running on in front and turning every few steps to see that they were following. Harz and Christian were left alone. He was scraping over his palette, and she still sitting with her elbows on her knees; between them, a gleam from the sinking sun dyed the pathway golden; already in the air was the feel of evening, bushes and flowers springing erect after the day's heat breathed out perfume; the birds had started evensong.

"Are you tired of sitting for your portrait, Fräulein Christian?" he asked, with a quiver in his voice he could not have explained.

"I like to help you; I know it will be good."

"I don't know whether people will like it, and I don't care. I will get something into it that everybody does not see—something that's behind the surface and lasts."

He spoke like a man giving a challenge.

Christian said slowly: "I think you were right when you said, 'All happiness is in the fighting.' For yourself, I mean—not for me." She twisted her hands. "I'm a coward. I hate to hurt people, I like them to like me. If *you* had to do anything to hurt people and make them hate you, you would do it all the same."

He looked at her surprised, there seemed a change in her face; the colour was going and coming in her cheeks.

"Yes," she said, "you would, if it helped your work; and that is fine—it's what I can't do. It's—it's everything."

She clasped her hands, and asked suddenly, "do you like Uncle Nic?"

"I don't know; he is very strange and interesting. I tell you what I think," he said, with a twinkle. "If I were the finest artist in the world, he would not think anything of me; but if I were to show him a handful of big cheques for £500 for bad pictures I had painted, he would respect me very much."

"Ah! you don't know him! I love him, he's been so awfully good to me, more a father than an uncle."

"Then I shall like him," he said simply, leaning forward to drop his brushes into his satchel. She put out her hand, and her fingers met his for a moment.

"We shall be late," she said, glowing with colour; and she caught up her book. "I'm always late."

CHAPTER VII

THERE was one other guest at dinner, a trim-looking man with a pale, fattish face, dark eyes, and hair thin on the temples. His clothes had a military cut. He looked like a man fond of the easy side of life, who had got out of his groove, and come into collision with something hard and crushing. Herr Paul had brought him back from the Kurhaus and introduced him as Count Sarelli.

Two hanging lamps with crimson shades threw a rosy light upon the table; in the centre stood a silver basket full of purple irises.

Through the open windows the garden could be seen, all clusters of black foliage against the last glow of daylight. Moths fluttered in and circled round the lamps; Greta followed them with her eyes, and gave a quite audible sigh of delight if they escaped unhurt. Both girls wore white dresses, and Harz, who sat opposite to Christian, kept looking at her, and thinking, "Why didn't I paint her in white?"

The dinner, thanks to Herr Paul, was good; the two servants silent like their own shadows which fled along the walls; Mrs Decie understood the art of dining—at her end of the table there was always a gentle hum of conversation.

Sarelli, who sat on her right hand, seemed to

partake of little except olives, of which he ate a great many, dipping them first into a glass of sherry; he turned his solemn, black eyes silently from one speaker to the other, and occasionally asked the meaning of some English word he did not understand. The conversation had turned on the lugubrious question: whether or no a criminal can be told by the expression of his face.

"Crime," said Mrs Decie, passing her hand languidly over her brow; "crime is only the hall-mark of individuality."

Miss Naylor, looking rather shocked, and flushing a hasty pink, stammered: "Oh, but a great crime! —a great crime must show itself—a murder for instance."

"If that's so," said Dawney, "we've only got to look about us, and what becomes of detectives?"

Miss Naylor rejoined with slight severity:

"I cannot conceive that such an unforgiveable thing can pass the human face by and leave no impression."

"Why is it unforgiveable?" said Christian.

"It's hangable," put in Dawney; "forgiveable afterwards, '*de mortuis*'—"

Christian bit her lips, and looked at Harz.

He said abruptly: "There are worse things than murder."

"Ah! *par exemple*!" said Sarelli in his rather harsh, hissing voice, leaning forward and fixing his eyes on Harz; "and what then do you say is worse?"

"Meanness," said Harz, getting red.

"Ah! ah!" There was a slight stir round the table.

"Verry good—verry good," said Herr Paul from his end, holding up a glass of wine, "*à votre santé, mon cher.*"

Miss Naylor gave a slight shiver as if some one had put an unaccustomed penny down her back, Dawney tilted himself back in his chair and laughed, while Mrs Decie leant towards Harz, smiling with the expression of one who has succeeded in putting an animal through a trick. Christian alone remained motionless, looking thoughtfully at Harz.

"I saw a man tried for murder once, a murder for revenge; the judge had a beautiful voice, and a face you would like to do *that* to." (He made the motion of a slap with the back of his hand.) "I thought when I looked at him I'd rather be that murderer than you, you're a *mean* fellow; you crawl through life; you're not a criminal, but only because you haven't the courage."

There was a moment of silence; Mr Treffry began humming faintly. Then Sarelli said, pronouncing his words very distinctly:

"Ah! you would let them go free, these fine murderers, hein? Anarchists also, perhaps, who are not even men, but wild beasts, whom I would tear to pieces."

Harz looked at him defiantly.

"I wouldn't let them go, I expect it is wise to hang them; only I say I would rather be hanged than be a mean fellow."

"When I was last hanged—" drawled Dawney.

"Why shouldn't they be given a chance of doing better?" broke in Christian; "how can we tell what they went through first, and what their lives were?"

Miss Naylor, who had been agitatedly rolling up a little pellet of bread, concealed it hastily and said: "They are—always given a chance to —repent—I believe."

"Grace before meat—'For what we are about to receive,'" murmured Dawney.

Mrs Decie, leaning forward, made a sign with her fan.

"We are trying to express the inexpressible —shall we go into the garden?" she said vaguely.

All rose; Harz stood by the window, and Christian in passing whispered to him: "Thank you!"

He sat down again in his old seat at the table with a sudden feeling of loss, a sense of annoyance that there was nothing but the wall to be seen through the green and purple of the irises. When he raised his eyes they met Sarelli's. The Italian was regarding him with a strange stare.

Herr Paul came round with a box of cigars. Harz took one mechanically and lighted it, filled his glass and sipped his wine, but all the time he was thinking of Christian.

At his end of the table Herr Paul, holding his glass up to the light, began to retail a piece of scandal he had heard at the Kurhaus.

"Prrrt! shocking affair!" he said; "I could never

have believed it of her!" and he tapped his snowy shirt front with the tips of his podgy fingers.

"What's that?" said Dawney, lolling in his chair.

"You know the Boltons who have been here the last three springs. Well, Madame Bolton has left her husband; Bolton is quite beside himself. Yesterday it seems there was what you call a row!"

"There has been one every day for months," muttered Dawney.

"This morning then she left, without a word, and has gone one does not know where. Bolton is '*viveur*' no doubt, perhaps a little too much, *mais, mon Dieu, que voulez-vous?* She was always a poor, pale thing. Why I, when—when my—" he gave his cigar an apologetic flourish: "I was not always—always—what I should have been—one lives in a world of flesh and blood—we are not all angels—*que diable!*" He reflected.

"It is a very vulgar business, this—shocking! She goes off; leaves everything—without a word; and Bolton is very fond of her. I tell you these things are not done"; the starched bosom of his shirt swelled with indignation.

Mr Treffry, sitting back in his chair, with a heavy hand on the table, eyed him sideways. Dawney said slowly:

"Bolton is a beast; I'm sorry for the poor woman; but what can she do by herself?"

"Perhaps there is a man," put in Sarelli.

Herr Paul muttered: "Ah! who knows?"

"No!" said Dawney; "what is Bolton going to do?"

"Ah! Bolton," said Herr Paul, "Bolton is fond of her. He is a chap of resolution, he will get her back—he told me: 'Well, you know, I shall follow her wherever she goes until she comes back.' He will do it, he is a determined chap, Bolton; he will follow her wherever she goes."

Mr Treffry drank his wine off at a gulp, and sucked his moustache in sharply.

"She was a fool to marry him," said Dawney; "they haven't a point in common, she hates him like poison, and she's the better type of the two. But it doesn't pay a woman to run off like that. She's made her own bed. Bolton had better hurry up though. What do you think, sir?" he said to Mr Treffry; "what should a fellow do under the circumstances?"

"Eh-h?" said Mr Treffry, "how should I know? Ask Paul there, he's one of your moral men, or Count Sarelli."

"I?" said the latter impassively. "If I cared for her perhaps I would kill her—if not"—he shrugged his shoulders.

Harz, who was eagerly watching his face, was reminded of his words at dinner, "wild beasts, whom I would tear to pieces." He looked with renewed interest at the quiet man who said these ferocious things; and thought: "I should like to paint him, this fellow."

Herr Paul twirled his wine-glass in his fingers.

"Prrrt!" he said grimacing, "there are family ties, there is society, there is decency, a wife should be with her husband. Bolton will do

quite right. He must go after her; she will not perhaps come at first; he will stay, he will follow her; she will begin to think, 'I am helpless—I am ridiculous!' Bah! a woman is soon beaten. They will return. She is with her husband again—society will forgive, it will be all right."

"By-y Jove, Paul," growled Mr Treffry, "you'd argue your own hind leg off."

"Yes," said Dawney, meditatively flicking at the terrier with his napkin.

"A wife is a wife," pursued Herr Paul; "a man has a right to her society."

"What do you say to that, sir?" said Dawney blandly.

Mr Treffry tugged at his beard.

"Eh-h?" he said; "make a woman live with you who don't want to live with you? If you ask me, I call it l-low."

"Bah! my dear," exclaimed Herr Paul, "how should you know? You have never been married."

"No, thank the Lord!" said Mr Treffry.

"But look at the question broadly, sir," said Dawney; "if a husband always let a wife do as she liked how would the thing work? What becomes of the marriage tie?"

"What!" growled Mr Treffry, "the marriage tie's the biggest thing there is!—I've nothing to say against it, n-not I; but, by Jo-ove, doctor, I'm a D-Dutchman if hunting women's to help the marriage tie."

"I see," said Dawney, "you'd make the knot a 'granny.' What about society, the community?"

"By George, sir," said Mr Treffry, "the community never yet asked a man to tread on his own self-respect; if I get my fingers skinned by a woman, what's the community got to do with it? D'ye think I'm going to whine to it, to put the plaster on, like any little tuppenny ha'penny cad? An' as to rights, it'd be a doosid sight better for us all if there wasn't such a fuss about 'em. Leave that to women! I wouldn't give a tinker's blessing for a man that talked about his r-rights."

Sarelli half rose from his seat.

"But your honour," he said, "there is your honour."

Mr Treffry stared at him.

"H-honour!" he grunted. "If hunting women's your idea of honour, all I can say is, it an't mine."

"Then you'd forgive her whatever she did?" said Dawney, with a last flick at the terrier.

"Forgive her! that's another thing," said Mr Treffry. "I n-never said that, I leave that to y'r sanctimonious beggars. But hunt a woman! Hang it, sir, I'm not a snob," and he brought his fingers down on the table with a rattle.

Sarelli fell back in his seat and twirled his moustaches fiercely. Dawney smiled, his black eyes twinkling. Harz, who had risen from the table, and was standing where the light fell across his features, struck his hands together. His eyes rested upon Christian's empty place.

"If I were married," he thought, with a sudden sense of utter disturbance.

Herr Paul, a somewhat vinous glare in his eyes, and his fingers moving, said:

"Bah! my dear! but your duty to the family, to society, to——"

"Ga-ammon!" murmured Mr Treffry.

Harz slipped through the window into the garden. The moon was swinging like a wonderful white lantern in the purple dome of the sky, and low in the heavens there was a smoulder of stars. The air was warm and soft, but it had the magic of the snows; it made the blood tingle in his veins, made him want to run and leap. A sleepy beetle dropped with a thump from the twig of a rosebush; he turned it over with his toe and watched it scurry away over the grass. Inside the house Miss Naylor was playing Schumann's *Kinder Scenen*; he stood still to listen, and the pure notes came twining and weaving themselves around his thoughts; the night seemed full of girlish voices, of hopes and fancies, soaring away to mountain heights—invisible, yet ever present. Between the dark stems of the acacias he could see the flicker of white dresses, where Christian and Greta were walking with linked arms. He made a step to join them, the blood flushed up in his face, he felt almost surfeited by some sweet emotion. He stamped his foot on the grass with sudden horror. "I'm in love! With nothing done—everything before me! I'm going to bow down to a face—to two eyes!" He turned; the flicker of the white dresses was no longer visible. "I won't be fettered and hindered—I'll stamp it out!" With every step he took he felt how much stamping out it would need.

Round the corner of the house, in the shadow

of the wall, Dominique, the Luganese, with his slippered feet crossed, was smoking a pipe and leaning his shoulders against a tree; he had the appearance of a mild Mephistopheles in evening clothes. Harz walked straight up to him.

"Lend me a pencil, Dominique."

"Certainly, m'sieu," said Dominique, with a saturnine and sympathetic smile.

Resting a card against the tree Harz wrote to Mrs Decie: "Pardon—an affair of necessity. In a few days I shall hope to finish the picture."

He begged Dŏminique to find him his hat, and during those few seconds suffered all the horrors of indecision; twenty times he was on the point of tearing up the card and running back out of the shadow.

When the Luganese returned he thrust the card into his hand, and without a word walked swiftly to the entrance, where the tall poplars stood waiting, all silver in the moonlight like ragged ghosts.

CHAPTER VIII

He walked away down the road. A dog was howling and the sound seemed like the remonstrance of his own heart. He looked for a stone, but could not see one, and experienced a feeling of helplessness. Was there nothing that would put an end to this emotion within him? He hurried on to the studio, but when he reached it he could only tramp up and down. He threw himself at last upon his mattress, and pressed his hands to his eyes. "I'll get away," he kept thinking.

Just before daybreak he slipped out of the house with a knapsack, and took the Meran road.

He had not quite passed through Gries when he overtook a man who was walking slowly in the middle of the road and leaving a trail of cigar smoke behind him.

"Ah! my friend," said the smoker in a rather thick voice, "you walk early; are you going my way?"

He recognised Count Sarelli; the raw light had imparted a grey tinge to his pale face, and a growth of beard showed black beneath the skin; his thumbs were hooked in the pockets of a closely buttoned coat, and he gesticulated with his fingers.

"You are making a journey?" he said politely, nodding his head at the knapsack. "You are

early—I am late; our friend has capital kümmel, I have drunk too much. You have not been to bed, hein?" He gave a sharp look. "If there is no sleep in one's bed, it is no good going, hein. You find that? It's better to drink kümmel . . . Pardon! You are doing the right thing; get away! Get away as fast as you can!—don't wait and let it catch you," and he gritted his teeth. Harz looked at him in amazement. "Pardon!" continued Sarelli, raising his hat, "that girl, the white girl—I saw. You do well—get away!" he swayed a little as he walked. "That old fellow—what is his name—Tr-reffr-ry, hein! what a notion of honour!" He mumbled: "Honour is an abstraction! If a man is not true to an abstraction, he is a low type. Wait a minute!" and he put his hand to his side. The hedges on either side were brightening with the faintest pinky glow, the long road was desert, there was no sound but that of their own footsteps; suddenly a bird began chirping, another answered — the hedges seemed full of their voices.

Sarelli stopped.

"That white girl," he said, speaking with frightful rapidity, "again, pardon! you do well; get away! don't let it catch you, see!—what happened to me! I waited, it caught me—what happened? Everything horrible—and now"— he threw up his hands —"kümmel!" With a thick laugh he gave his moustaches a twirl and walked on.

"I was a fine fellow — nothing big without Emanuel Sarelli; the regiment waited for me—

they looked to me. Then *she* came—with her eyes, and her white dress, always white like this one; the little mole on her chin, her hands always moving—moving, and their touch warm like sunbeams. Then, no longer Emanuel Sarelli for this! Emanuel Sarelli for that! The little house at Verona by the ramparts, two arms, two eyes, nothing in the heart but flames that made ashes quickly—in *her*, you know, like the ash there," he flicked the white flake from the end of his cigar. "It's droll! you agree that it's droll—hein? Some day I shall go back and kill her. In the meantime—I want her! I want her! and so—kümmel!"

He stopped at the gate of a house by the roadside, and stood gripping the rail; his teeth were bared in a grin. "Pardon!" he said, "I bore you." He flung the cigar, and it spluttered on to the road in front of Harz. "I live here, so—good morning! You are a man for work—you are of the people, hein? *I* know, and you are young—get away! The man who loves flesh better than an abstraction is a low type—I am a low type. I! Emanuel Sarelli, a low type! I love flesh better than an abstraction." He remained swaying at the gate with the grin fixed upon his face, the next moment he raised his head, staggered up the steps, and banged the door. A moment later, however, he reappeared, beckoning in the gap of the doorway. Obeying an impulse Harz followed into the house.

"What will you drink?" asked Sarelli. "It is

good of you to come in, we will make a night of it; there's wine, brandy, kümmel. I am virtuous, kümmel for me!"

He sat down at the piano and touched the notes. Harz poured out some wine. Sarelli nodded.

"You begin with that? *Allegro—piu—presto!* Wine—brandy—kümmel!" he quickened the time; "it is not a long passage, and *this*"—he took his hands suddenly off the keys—"comes after."

Harz smiled.

"Some men do not kill themselves," he said.

Sarelli answered with great politeness: "You think?" and began playing a tarantella, bending over and swaying his head in time to the music. Suddenly he broke off, and letting his eyes rest on the other, started Schumann's *Kinderscenen.* Harz leapt to his feet.

"Stop!" he cried.

"That pricks you?" said Sarelli suavely; "what do you think of *this*?" He played again, crouching over the piano and making every note throb under his fingers like the cry of a wounded animal.

"That is for me!" he said, swinging slowly round on his seat and rising.

"Your health! And so you do not believe in suicide, only in murder? The custom is the other way; but perhaps you do not believe in custom. Customs are only for society, hein?" He tossed off a glass of kümmel. "You don't love society?"

Harz looked at him intently; did he want to quarrel?

"I don't care what people think," he said at last; "I follow what I feel is right."

"And is society never right? That poor society!"

"Society! what is society—a few men in good coats? What has it done for me?"

Sarelli crossed his legs and lit another cigar.

"Ah!" he said, "it is good to be an artist, a fine bantam cock of an artist; where other men have dis-ci-pline, he has his own, what shall we say?—mound of roses?"

Harz started to his feet.

"Yes," said Sarelli passively, with a slight hiccough; "you are a fine fellow."

"And you are drunk," cried Harz in a rage.

"Yes," assented the other, "a little drunk—not much, not enough to matter!"

Harz broke into a fit of laughter. What was happening? He was cracked to stay there listening to this fellow. What had brought him in? and he made a motion towards the door.

"Ah," said Sarelli, "it is no good going to bed, let us talk. I have a lot to say—it is pleasant to talk to a socialist now and then."

The full daylight was already coming in through the chinks of the shutters.

"You are all socialists, you painters, you writing fellows. You live by playing ball with facts, images — nothing solid — nothing, hein? You're all for the new things too, to tickle your nerves. No discipline—no discipline! True socialists every one of you."

Harz poured out another bumper of wine and

drank it off at a draught; he was beginning to get excited.

"I think for myself; it's only a fool who takes a thing for granted. As for discipline, what do you know about it, you aristocrats? Have you ever been hungry? Have you ever had your soul on its back?"

Sarelli bent his head courteously. "Soul on its back?" he said. "Hein! soul on its back? that is good."

"A man will never do anything," went on Harz, "if he is always thinking of what others think—it is the meanest life that; he has not courage to stand by himself, he is always afraid—'I musn't say this, they will not think it *nice*!' 'Ach! I musn't do this—it will shock them!' He will never do anything."

"Consideration for other people," murmured Sarelli thickly.

"Ah!" exclaimed Harz, "it isn't. I think it is always consideration for himself."

Sarelli swallowed some kümmel.

"What would you do?" he said abruptly, striking his chest, "if you — you had a devil in here? Would you go to bed?"

Harz stared. His eyebrows worked up and down; he drank some more wine, and a sort of feverish pity seized upon him. He began, in a disjointed way, to say consoling words; but suddenly he stopped. What was there between him and this man? He felt as if he had been trying to pity himself; he felt disgust that there

should be any link in his mind between Christian and this man's love. He started up and began to stride up and down the room; and Sarelli seemed to have an intuitive knowledge of his emotions.

"Harz!" he muttered, leaning forward with a disagreeable smile: "Harz!—that means 'tar' in your language, hein? Your family is not an old one?"

Harz glared at him, and said:

"My father is a peasant."

Sarelli lifted the kümmel bottle, and poured himself out a glass with a perfectly steady hand.

"And you are honest—but we both have devils. Drink! Ah! I forgot. I brought you in to show you a picture." He threw wide the shutters; the windows were open, and a rush of fresh air came into the room. "Ah!" he said, sniffing: it smells of the earth, *nicht wahr, Herr Artist? you* should know—your father . . . Come! here is my picture, a Correggio!"

Harz looked; the picture was a copy.

"Well! and what do you think of it?"

Harz finished his wine. What next? He felt his head going round.

"It's clever; but allow me to ask, do you set much store by it?"

"*Allons!* A Correggio!"

"I am very sorry, but that is a copy."

Sarelli curled his moustaches.

"Ah!" he said rudely; "you think?"

"Think!" cried Harz, his eyes dilating: "I *know*."

"Then you give me the lie, Signor artist," and drawing his handkerchief from his pocket he flicked it deliberately in the other's face. Harz turned white.

"Hein?" went on Sarelli: "duelling is a custom; you don't know any customs, but I shall have the honour to teach you this one, unless you are afraid. Here are pistols—this is a very good room, it is twenty feet across at the least, and twenty feet is a fair distance;" he pulled a case from a drawer, and sitting down astride of a chair, placed two pistols on the table: "the light is good too; but perhaps you are afraid."

"Give me one," shouted Harz in a towering passion: "and go to the devil!"

"A moment!" murmured Sarelli blandly. "I will load them, they are more useful loaded."

Harz leaned in the window, his head whirled.

"He's a madman! Am I drunk? What's happening?" A desire to laugh seized upon him in the midst of his anger. "Confound him!" he thought; "I'm not going to be killed. What's to be done?" He turned and went up to the table. With his head sunk on his arms, Sarelli was asleep. Harz stared; and methodically began putting the pistols back into their case. A young woman stood before him in a loose gown hastily caught together across her chest. Her grey eyes were glancing from him to the bottles—from them to the pistol-case. The reasoning struck him as cogent and comical.

It is not often like this" she said in the country

patois; "*der Herr* must not be alarmed; will he have the graciousness to lift the feet?" She took the motionless Sarelli under the arms, and they lifted him on to a couch. "Ah!" she said, sitting down and resting an elbow on the table; "he will not wake."

He bowed to her; she bent her head humbly. Catching up his knapsack, he ran out of the house. A feeling of positive sickness was upon him.

The smoke of cottages rose straight; wisps of mist nestled in the mountain hollows; the song of birds dropped upon him like blessings. In the night the spiders had spun over the meadows a sea of threads that bent and quivered to the dance of the air like fairy tight-ropes.

He tramped all day. The country seemed to him in a conspiracy of sleepy contentment. Passing a village forge he saw the smith and his mate beating a ring of fire. He would have liked to join them, and thought viciously how he would make the sparks fly. The smith, a tall fellow with knotted muscles, sleepy eyes, and a fair beard, came out to stretch, and wipe his brow.

"*Grüss Gott!*" called out Harz. The man gaped and adjusted his apron.

"*Grüss Gott!*" he answered sulkily, turning back into the forge and swinging his hammer.

In the road a team of white oxen were waiting to be harnessed, slowly lashing their tails and moving their heads from side to side; an old woman at her cottage door blinked placidly and knitted wool.

The white houses, with gaping caves of storage

under the roof, the pointed green spire of the church, the clink, clink of the hammers, and a faint hum that came from the village school, spoke of sleepy toil, without ambition or ideas. He knew it all very well; like the smell of the earth it belonged to him, as that fellow had said. But he asked himself if he had really ever been a part of all this?

Towards sunset he came to a copse of larch trees, and sat down at the edge to rest. It was a very still evening. All around there was the tinkle of cow-bells, and somewhere in the distance at measured intervals the hollow sound of dropping logs.

Two little boys came out of the wood and passed close; they marched earnestly along the narrow path, with bare feet, looking at Harz as if he were some strange kind of monster. When they were once past they began to run.

"I should have done just the same," he thought, and a hundred memories rushed into his mind.

He looked down at the village straggling below —white houses with russet tiles and crowns of smoke, vineyards where the young leaves were beginning to shoot forth, a red-capped spire, a thread of bubbling stream, an old stone cross. He had been fourteen years struggling up out of it; he was just beginning to breathe—to have the time to give himself wholly to his art; and now this weakness had come. Better a thousand times to give her up!

In one or two houses lights began winking; the scent of wood smoke reached him, the distant chime of a bell, the burr of the stream.

He slept on the hillside, under the brightness of the moon.

CHAPTER IX

THE next morning his one thought was to get back to work. He arrived at the studio in the afternoon, and, laying in a stock of provisions, barricaded the lower door and set to work to paint furiously. For three days he did not go out; on the fourth day he went to the Villa Rubein. . . .

Schloss Runkelstein—grey, blind, strengthless—still keeps the valley. The windows which once, like eyes, watched men and horses creeping through the snow, braved the splutter of guns, and the gleam of torches, are holes now for birds to nest in. Tangled creepers have spread to the very summit of the walls. In the keep, instead of grim men in armour, there is a wooden board with a record and instructions about refreshments. Only at night, when the cold moon blanches life and stills the reason, the castle stands awesome, like a grim ghost, high above the silver trickle of the Talfer.

After a long morning's sitting the girls had started with Harz and Dawney to spend an afternoon at the ruin. Miss Naylor, kept at home by a headache, watched them depart with many words of caution against sunstroke, stinging nettles, and strange dogs. They explored the castle until they were tired. Presently Christian and Harz found themselves alone on one of the battlements. The girl's face wore a hurt look, and she kept

her eyes fixed upon the ground. Since his return they had hardly spoken to one another. A little way below them, on a railed gallery with small tables, two soldiers were drinking beer, and playing a game which seemed to necessitate a ceaseless changing of seats; and at the top of a flight of stairs the caretaker's daughter sang away to herself, sewing at a blue garment. Suddenly Christian said: "I thought we were friends."

"Well, Fräulein Christian," Harz answered ironically; "are we not?"

"You went away without a word; a friend doesn't do that."

Harz reddened and bit his lips.

"I don't think you care," she went on with a sort of desperate haste; "whether you hurt people or not. You *can't*, if you've been here all this time without going to see your father and mother."

"Do you think they would want to see me?"

Christian looked up.

"Everything's been soft for you," he said bitterly; "you don't understand."

He turned away, and took two or three steps; in a minute he came back and burst out; "I'm proud that I come straight from the soil — I wouldn't have it different; but they are the *people*, everything's narrow with them, they only understand what they can see and touch."

Christian rested her chin in her hand.

"I'm sorry I spoke like that," she said; "tell me about yourself."

"I always hated the peasant life—I wanted to get

away. I wanted to get into the world; I had it in here, the feeling—Ah! it is so strong—you can't tell what it's like! I wanted—I don't know what I wanted! I ran away at last to a house-painter at Meran. Afterwards the priest wrote me a letter for my father—they threw me off; that was the end."

Christian's eyes were bright, her lips moved a little, like a child's listening to a story.

"Go on," she said.

"I stayed at Meran two years, till I'd learnt all that was to be learnt. Then a brother of my mother's helped me with some money to get to Vienna; I was very lucky, I came with a man whose business was to decorate churches. We went all over the country; once when my master was ill I painted the roof of a church all alone; I lay on my back on the scaffold boards all day for a week—I was proud of that roof." He paused.

"But how did you come to paint pictures?"

"A friend asked me why I didn't try for the Academie? So I went to the night-schools; I worked every minute—I had to get my bread, you see, so I worked at night. Then came the examination; I thought I could do nothing—it was just as if I never had pencil or brush in my hand. The second day a professor passed, and said 'Good!' I took courage after that. When it was over I was sure I had failed; but I was second out of sixty."

Christian nodded with a feeling of secret pride.

"I worked in the schools, I had to give up

my business. There was only one teacher who taught me anything, the others were all fools—they used to say, 'yes—very good—a little more' —I couldn't learn from those fellows; but this man came by and rubbed what you had done out with his sleeve. I used to cry with rage—I learnt from him. I told the director I could only learn from that fellow—he was so astonished that he let me go into his class."

"But how did you live?" asked Christian; "you hadn't any money."

He looked at her, and his face burned with a dark flush.

"I don't know how I lived," he said slowly; "you must have been through these things yourself to know, you would never understand."

"But I want to—I would give anything to understand."

"What do you want me to tell you?" he said harshly; "how I went twice a week to eat free dinners! How I took charity! How I was hungry! What does it mean to you if I say it a hundred times?"

But suddenly he went on:

"There was a rich cousin of my mother's—I went to him. Do you think I liked it? but if you haven't bread! in the winter——"

Christian put out her hand.

"I would borrow an apronful of coals from another student who was poor like myself—I never went to the rich students."

His face had whitened.

"It makes one hate everything; you work till you stagger; you're hungry and cold; you see the rich people in their carriages wrapped in furs, and all the time you want to do something great; you pray for a chance, any chance; but nothing goes to the poor. No, nothing goes to the poor. Ah! that makes you hate everything."

Christian's eyes had filled with tears. He went on:

"I wasn't the only one. We used to meet and talk. Garin, a Russian, with a brown beard and patches of cheek showing through; yellow teeth, too—he always looked hungry. Paunitz: he was rich, he came from sympathy—sympathy! He had fat cheeks and little eyes, and a big, gold chain; he was a swine, that fellow. And there was little Misek: we met in his room, with yellow walls, and the paper peeling off, and two doors with cracks in them, so that there was always a draught. We used to sit on his bed, and pull the dirty blankets over us for warmth, and smoke—there was nearly always tobacco. Over the bed was a Virgin and Child—he was a very devout Catholic; but one day, when he had no dinner, and a dealer had kept his picture and would not pay him, he took the image and threw it on the floor before us; it broke, you know, and he trampled on the bits. Lendorf was another, a heavy fellow who was always puffing out his white cheeks, and smiting himself, and saying, '*Die Verfluchte Gesellschaft*!' And Schönborn, *blaublüthig* he was, but had quarrelled with his family. He

was the poorest of us; only he and I would ever have done anything—they all knew that!"

Christian listened with awe.

"Do you mean?" she said, "do you mean——"

"You see!" he cried, "you're afraid of me. It's not possible even for you to understand. It only makes you afraid. A man who has lived hungry on charity, sick with rage and shame because he's a *man*—ah! he's only a beast and a wolf, even to *you* only a thing to be afraid of."

Christian looked up straight into his eyes.

"You mustn't say that it's not true."

He felt ashamed. There was a silence.

"If I can't understand, I can feel—perhaps a woman could never understand quite. I want you to tell me: would you feel the same now if it were to come again?"

"It drives me mad to think of people fat with prosperity sneering and holding up their hands at poor devils who have suffered ten times more than the most those soft animals could bear. I'm older; I've lived—I know things cannot be put right by violence—nothing will put things right, but that doesn't stop my feeling."

Christian put her hand on his arm.

"Did you do anything?" she asked quietly. "You must tell me all now."

The touch soothed him. He said:

"We talked—we were always talking."

"No," said Christian. "Tell me everything!"

Unconsciously she claimed, and unconsciously he admitted in her a right to this knowledge.

"There's not much to tell. One day we began to talk in low voices—Garin began it; he had been in some affair in Russia; there were vows made; after that we never raised our voices—there was a plan. It was all new to me, I hated it; but I would come hungry or sick with charity, and I would have done anything. They knew it; they used to look at me and Schönborn; we knew that no one else had any courage. We were great friends, but we never talked about *that*; we tried to look away from it; if we had a good day and were not hungry, it seemed so heavy, ugh!—so heavy; but when the days had not been good! then . . . I wasn't afraid, but I used to start up in the night and walk; I hated those oaths, I hated every one of those fellows; the thing was not what I was made for, it wasn't my work, it wasn't nature, it was forced on me; I tell you I hated it, but sometimes I would come to them like—like——"

"Yes, yes," she murmured.

"All the time I worked at the Academie; I learnt all I could. . . . One evening they came and fetched me. Paunitz did not come. There was just one tallow candle for light, Misek was telling us — the thing was arranged, you see! Schönborn had been drinking. He and I looked at each other—it was warm—perhaps we were not hungry—it was springtime, too, and in the spring it's different. There is something——"

Christian nodded.

"While we were talking," he went on, "there

came a knock on the door. Lendorf put his eye to the keyhole. He whispered, 'Police!' Nobody said anything. There was another knock at the door. Then Misek crawled under the bed, and we followed, and the knocking was louder all the time. In the wall at the back of the bed there was a little door into an empty cellar. We crept through. There was a trap behind some cases where they used to roll the barrels in. Misek opened it, and we crawled through that into the back street. We went different ways."

He paused, and Christian gave a gasp.

"I thought I would get my money, but there was a policeman before my door. Ah! they had us finely. It was Paunitz, and if I would meet him now even, I would wring his neck. . . . I swore I would not be caught, you know, but I couldn't tell where to go. Then I thought of a little Italian barber that used to shave me when I had the money, and I knew he would help. He belonged to an Italian Society, and he talked to me sometimes very big under his breath. I went there. He was shaving, because he was going to a ball. I told him. He came with the soap on his face, and stood with his back against the door. I asked him to give me a wig. He had very clever wigs, because he had much to do with actors. He was a little man. I laughed at him, he looked so funny with the soap on his face. He said: '*Si—si—ein, zwei, drei.*' He was terribly frightened, you see, because he understood about these things more than I did —I was only twenty. He made me sit down, and

shaved my head quite close, and my moustache, and put a fair wig on my head. Then he went to his kitchen and brought some maccaroni and cheese, and a little piece of meat, and told me to eat. He gave me a big, fair moustache, and a cap, and hid the moustache in the lining of the cap. He brought me a cloak of his own, too, and four *gulden*. All the time he was very frightened, and kept listening and saying :

"'Eat!'

"When I had done, he said :

"'Now, I don't know you any more—get away!' and he opened the door.

"I thanked him and went away. All that night I walked about, I couldn't think of anything to do or any where to go. In the morning I slept on a seat in one of the squares. I thought I would go to the *Gallerien* ; and I went, and spent the whole day looking at the pictures. When they were shut I walked out. I was very tired, so I went into a *café*, and had food and some beer. When I came out, I sat on a seat in the square. I meant to wait till dark and then walk out of the city and take the train at some little station. I was very wretched. While I was sitting on the seat I went to sleep. A policeman woke me. He held my wig in his hand.

"'Why do you wear a wig?' he said.

"I answered, 'Because I am bald!'

"'No,' he said, 'you are not bald, you have been shaved. I can feel the hair coming.'

"He put his finger on my head. I felt quite reckless. I laughed.

" He said, ' You will come and give an account of yourself, your nose and eyes are looked for.'

" I said nothing, and went with him quietly. He took me to the police office."

He was carried away by his own story. He had never told anyone before, and each detail came before him as vividly as though it had happened yesterday.

The sun struck aslant and hot upon the battlements. Christian drew herself together, sitting with her hands clasped round her knees.

CHAPTER X

"HE took me to the police office. I didn't care then what came of it. I didn't even think what I should say. He led me down a passage to a room, with bars on the windows and long seats, and on the walls lists of trains and maps. He said nothing; we sat down and waited. I was in a passion—he sat there staring at me; it was like being a rat in a trap. I did not see any hope, so I sat and read the trains. Presently the Inspector came. I could have killed him when he ordered me about. He said, 'Bring him in here,' and went into the next room. It had a large clock, a writing-table and a window, without bars, over a courtyard. On the walls there were some long policemen's coats and caps hanging. He said to me, 'Take off your cap and show your wig.' I took it off and my wig too. I laughed, but I was in a fine rage. The Inspector said, 'Who are you?' I said nothing; there was a loud sound of voices in the room where we came from. The Inspector said, 'Look after that fellow,' and went into the other room. I could hear them talking. Then the Inspector called, 'Come here, Becker!' Well, I stood very quiet and he went to the door. I heard the Inspector say, 'Go and look for Schwartz, I will see after this fellow.' The policeman went, and

the Inspector stood with his back to me in the half-open door, and began again to talk to the man in the other room. Once or twice he looked at me over his shoulder, but I stood quiet all the time. Then they began to disagree, and their voices got angry. The Inspector moved a little into the other room. I thought, 'Now!' so I slipped off my cloak. I took a policeman's coat and cap very softly and put them on. My heart beat so that I felt sick. I went on tip-toe to the window. There was no one outside, but at the entrance a man holding three horses. I opened the window a little. I held my breath. I heard the Inspector say very loud, 'I will report you for impertinence!' I slipped through the window. The coat came down nearly to my heels, and the cap over my eyes. I walked past the man with the horses and said, '*Guten Abend!*' One of the horses was kicking, so he only grunted. I got into a tram passing; it was five minutes to the West *Bahnhof*, and I got out there. There was a train starting; they were shouting, '*Einsteigen!*' I ran. The collector tried to stop me. I shouted 'Important, important.' He let me by. I jumped into a carriage. The train moved."

He sighed, and Christian sighed too.

Presently he went on, twisting a twig of ivy in his hands:

"There was another man in the carriage reading a paper. I began to think. I said to the man, 'Can you tell me where we first stop?' He said, 'St Polten.' Then I knew it was the München

express—Polten—Amstetten—Linz—Salzburg—München ; only four stops before the frontier. The man put down his paper and looked at me ; he had a big fair moustache and rather shabby clothes. That disturbed me very much, his looking at me ; I thought each minute he would say, 'Why, you're not a policeman!' Suddenly it came into my mind, 'They will look for me in *this* train, as a policeman,' because it was known at the station that a policeman had run past at the last minute. I wanted to get rid of the coat and cap, but the man was there, and I did not want to move out of the carriage for other people to see me. So I had to sit still. We came to Polten. Nothing happened, but the man took his bag and got out, and left his newspaper on the seat. We started again, then I breathed, and as soon as we had gone a few minutes I took off the cap and coat and threw them out of the window into the darkness. I thought, 'Now I will get across the frontier.' I tell you I was excited then. I took my own cap out of my pocket, and found the moustache Luigi gave me. I rubbed my clothes as clean as I could ; I stuck on the moustache ; with some little ends of chalk I found in my pocket I made my eyebrows light, and drew some lines in my face to make it look older, and I pulled my cap well down over my wig. Oh! I did that well—I was like the man who had just got out. I sat in the corner where he had sat, and took up his newspaper, but I didn't read—I waited for Amstetten. It seemed very long before we came there. I looked out of the window—five

or six policemen stood on the platform, one quite close, when I put my head out. I sat in my corner behind my paper. A policeman opened the door and looked round—I looked at him; he walked through the carriage into the corridor. I took some tobacco and rolled up a cigarette, but it shook—like this," and he lifted the ivy twig that trembled in his fingers. "After a minute the conductor and two policemen came to the door. The conductor said, 'He was here, *mit diesem Herrn.*' One of them looked at me and said, 'Have you seen a policeman travelling on this train?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Where?' I said, 'Here, but he got out at Polten.' The policeman said to the conductor, 'Did you see him get out?' The conductor said, 'No.' I said, 'He got out just as the train was moving.' The policeman said, 'Ah! what was he like?' I said, 'Rather short—no moustache. Why?' The first policeman said, 'Did you notice anything?' I said, 'No; only that he wore coloured trousers. What is the matter?' One policeman said to the other, 'That is our man, send a telegraph to Polten; he has more than an hour's start.' He asked me where I was going. I said, 'To Linz.' 'Ah,' he said, 'you will have to give evidence; your name and address?' It came into my head to say, 'Josef Reinhardt, 17 Donau Strasse. Is it a serious thing?' He wrote it down. The conductor said, 'We are late, can we start?' They shut the door. I heard them say to the conductor, 'Search again at Linz, and report to the Inspector there.' There was hurrying on the platform, then

we started again. At first I thought, 'I'll get out as soon as the train leaves the station.' Then, 'I shall be too far from the frontier; it's better to go on to Linz and take the chance.' I sat still, and tried not to think. After a long, long time we began to run slowly. I put my head out and could see in the distance a great cluster of lights rather high, as if they were hanging in the blackness. I loosened the carriage door and waited for the train to run slower yet. I did not mean to go into Linz like a rat running into a trap, you see. At last I could wait no longer; I opened the door and jumped. I fell into some bushes. I was not much hurt, only bruised and the breath knocked out of me. When I was able I crawled out of the bushes.

"It was very dark; I stumbled away. I felt very heavy, and I went stumbling in and out amongst trees. Presently I came to a clear space; on one side was the shape of the town drawn in lighted lamps, and on the other a great dark mass, which I think was forest; in the distance, too, was a thin chain of lights. I thought, 'The lights of a bridge.' The moon came out then from behind the clouds, and the river was below, bright and shining. It was cold with damp; I walked quickly, and came to a road, past houses and barking dogs, and at last to the river. I sat against a shed and went to sleep. I woke very stiff. It was darker than before; the moon was gone. I could just see the river for the stars bathing in the waters. I stumbled along to get through the town before it was light.

"There were black shapes—houses and sheds, and the smell of the river, rotting hay, apples, tar, mud, fish—in the night it smells, in the daylight you do not notice; sometimes on the wharf there was a lantern. I stumbled round casks and wharfs and ropes and boxes; I saw I could not be clear of the town before dawn, it had begun already on the other side of the river with a yellow streak. Some men came from a house behind me. I bent myself and crept behind some barrels. They passed, walking along the wharf; they seemed to drop into the river. I heard one of them say: 'Passau before night!' When I stood upright I saw they had walked on board a steamer which was lying up stream with barges in tow. There was a plank laid to the steamer, and a lantern at the other end. I could hear where the fellows moved below deck, getting up the steam. I ran across the plank and crept to the end of the steamer. I thought: 'I'll go with them to Passau!' The rope which towed the barges was nearly tight-stretched; if I could get to the barges I would be safe. So I climbed on the rope and began to crawl along. I was very desperate, because I knew they would come up soon, and it was getting light. I thought I would fall into the water many times, but at last I came to the barge. It was laden with straw. There was nobody, and I made a hollow for myself in the straw. Many things had happened, you see—I was hungry and thirsty—I looked for anything to eat; there was nothing, only the ashes of a fire and a man's coat. So I hid in the straw. Soon

a boat brought some men, one for each barge, and then there were sounds of steam ; presently we moved through the water. I fell asleep. When I woke we were creeping through a mist heavy on the water. I made a little hole in the straw and saw the bargeman. He was quite close, sitting by a fire at the edge of the barge, so that the sparks and smoke blew away over the water. He ate and drank with both hands, and he looked funny in the mist, like a big bird flapping its wings ; there was a good smell of coffee too. I sneezed very loud ; *bei Gott!* it was funny to see how that fellow looked about! Presently he took a pitchfork and prodded in the straw. Then I stood up. I could not help laughing, he was so surprised—a great man, dark, with a black beard.

" I pointed to the fire, and said : ' Give me some ! ' He pulled me out of the straw with his big hands, I was so stiff, you see. I sat by the fire, and ate black bread and turnips and coffee very fast ; he stood by, watching and muttering. I could not understand very well when he spoke, it was the dialect from the borders of Hungary. At last he said :

" ' How did you get there—who are you—where are you from ? ' I looked up at him very hard, and he looked down at me, sucking his pipe. He was a very big man, and he lived alone on the river—I was tired too of telling lies—I told him everything. When I had done he grunted ' *Schön!* ' I remember him so, standing over me, with the mist hanging in his beard, and his great arms

naked. He drew me a bucket of water, and I washed, and showed him the wig and moustache, and threw them overboard—I was tired of them too. All that day we lay out on the barge in the mist, with our feet to the fire, smoking ; now and then he would spit into the ashes and say '*Schön !*' in his beard. Do I remember that day? The steamer was like a monster with flame in his nostrils, and behind us the other barges were dumb creatures with eyes where the fires smouldered, and how the bank glided by ! Sometimes a bluff, and high trees, or a castle, came out of the mist. If I had only had paint and a canvas that day ! " He sighed. " It was early spring and much water in the river ; they were going to Regensburg to unload there, take fresh cargo, and back to Linz. Later the mist began to clear. The bargeman hid me well in the straw. At Passau was the frontier, and they would lie there for the night. When it was dark again lights came twinkling and sliding along the shore ; then there were whistles, and we stopped, but nothing happened, and I slept in the straw. The next day I lay out on the barge deck, it was bright, but I did not care, I was free, you know—the sun was like gold on the straw and the green sacking ; the water seemed to dance for me, and I laughed—I laughed all the time, sometimes the bargeman would laugh with me. He was a fine fellow ! At Regensburg I helped them unload, for more than a week we worked, they called me '*Kahl-kopf*' (bald-head). When it was all over I gave the money I got for the

unloading away to the big bargeman ; we kissed each other when we parted. I had still three *gulden* that Luigi gave me, and I went to a house-painter and got work with him. For six months I stayed there and saved some money, then I wrote to my mother's cousin in Vienna, and told him I was going to London. He was kind, and gave me an introduction to some friends there. I went to Hamburg, and came to London in a cargo steamer, and I have been there since—I've never been back."

CHAPTER XI

AFTER a minute's silence Christian said in a startled voice: "They could arrest you."

He laughed.

"If they knew, but it's seven years ago."

"Why did you come here when it's so dangerous?"

"I had been working too hard—I wanted to see my own country. Ah! after seven years! and when it is forbidden, it seems so beautiful—but I'm ready to go back now." He looked down at her, frowning.

"Was it a hard time in London too?"

"At first, even harder—I could not speak the language, you see; but at last I begin to know it a little; sometimes I sell a picture, and my name is spoken of; perhaps now it is hardest of all"—he bit his lips, and burst out: "Those little, common fellows!—they will do any mean thing to keep you down. They have painted all their life, and at the end know nothing about art, or what it is to work for the sake of art; but they're rich, they have the power, nothing's too mean for them—they look at me, too, as if I did not exist; I sha'n't forget."

"But everyone is not like that?"

"No! there are fine fellows who help you, and love work for itself; I sha'n't forget them either. I

can sell my pictures now, I'm not so weak, and I promise you I don't forget; if in the future I have any power, and I shall!—I don't forget." He clenched his hands.

"Oh!" said Christian, "*you* are beyond that. That's only for smaller men."

"Ah!" he cried, "I'm not so sure!" but his face softened.

A shower of fine gravel came rattling sharply on the wall. In the courtyard Dawney was standing with an amused expression on his upturned face.

"Are you going to stay there all night?" he asked. "Greta and I have bored each other."

"We're coming," called Christian hastily.

On the way back neither spoke a word. When they reached the Villa, he took her hand, and said, stammering:

"Fräulein Christian, I cannot do any more with the picture. I sha'n't touch it again." She made no answer, but they looked at each other, and both seemed to ask, to entreat, something more; then her eyes fell. He dropped her hand, and crying "Good-night! good-night!" ran after Dawney.

In the corridor Dominique, carrying a dish of fruit, met the two girls; he gave them information —Miss Naylor had retired with her headache; Herr Paul would not be home for dinner; his master was dining in his own room; dinner would be served for Mrs Decie and the young ladies in a quarter of an hour. "Ah!—a-and the fish is good to-night —little trouts; try them, *Signorina mia*," he said; and moved on quickly and softly like a cat, the

tails of his dress-coat flapping, and the heels of white socks gleaming at the end of his black figure.

Christian ran upstairs; thoughts chased each other in her mind like clouds across a stormy sky; they flew too fast for her feet and hands; she had the feeling that if she stood still they would catch each other, and form one hard and painful thought, which motion kept away. She washed, changed her dress and shoes, and ran downstairs again to her uncle's room. Mr Treffry had just finished dinner; he had pushed the little table aside, and was sitting back in his arm-chair, with his glasses on his nose, reading the *Times*. Christian went over, and standing behind, touched his forehead with her lips.

"Ah-h! Chris, glad to see you."

"Is your foot bad, uncle?" she said, pointing to his slippered foot that rested on a cushion.

"Bit of a twinge," said Mr Treffry.

"Poor dear!"

"Your step-father's out to dinner, an' I can't stand your aunt when she's in one of her puzzivantin' moods—between ourselves, she's a bit of a humbug, you know, Chris." His eyes twinkled.

Christian smiled, running her fingers lightly over the top of his head.

"Picture finished?" asked Mr Treffry.

She did not answer.

Mr Treffry took up the paper again with a crackle.

"I sa-ay, Chris, don't you go and fall in love with the painter, old girl."

She turned pale to the lips; a feeling of dumb anger possessed her. "Why not?" she thought. "What should *you* know about him? Isn't he good enough for me?" She turned away abruptly. A gong sounded.

"There's your dinner, Chris," said Mr Treffry.

"Good-night, uncle." With a sudden contrite tenderness she bent and kissed him.

When she had left the room Mr Treffry put down the *Times*, and stared at the door, humming to himself, and thoughtfully fingering his chin.

Christian could not eat; she sat pale and silent, playing with her knife and fork, indifferent to the solicitous hoverings of Dominique, tormented by uneasy fears and longing. She answered Mrs Decie at random. Greta, who sat opposite, kept stealing upward looks at her from under her lashes.

"Decided characters are charming, don't you think so, Christian?" Mrs Decie said, thrusting her chin a little forward, and modelling the words beautifully with her pale lips; "that is why I like Mr Harz so much; such an immense advantage for a man to have decided opinions, you have only to look at that young man to see that he knows what he wants, and means to have it."

Christian pushed her plate away, and gazed at it with her hands in her lap. Greta, flushing, said abruptly, "Doctor Edmund is not a decided character, I think. This afternoon he said, 'Shall I have some beer—yes I shall—no I shall not'; then he ordered the beer, so, when it came, he gave it to the soldiers."

Mrs Decie moved her fan gently, turning her enigmatical smile from one girl to the other.

When dinner was over they went into her room. Greta stole to the piano, where her long hair fell almost on to the keys, and fingered the notes silently, smiling to herself, and looking at her aunt, who lay stretched on the sofa with her eyes closed, and a vinaigrette held to her nose. Christian had taken up a book, but put it down again—of several pages she had not understood a word; she walked restlessly out into the garden and wandered over the grass, clasping her hands behind her head. The air was heavy with heat; thunder trembled among the mountains, flashes of summer lightning played vividly behind the black leaves. Here and there fireflies darted through the silent darkness, illusive and tormenting as the girl's fancies. She ran to the little summer-house, flung herself on a seat, and pressed her hands to her eyes.

She had a sudden feeling of sickness; he was going away out of her life! She tried to imagine what would be left. Nothing! How little and narrow seemed the outlook of her existence! There was a great world waiting for her, a real world of beauty and effort, of self-sacrifice and fidelity, and he held the key. Some breath, like a flash of the summer lightning, had fled by, singeing her wings, taking everything—leaving a waste. Burning tears started up in her eyes, and trickled slowly between her fingers. "Blind!" she thought; "how could I have been so blind?"

Someone came rapidly down the path. A gleam lit up the arbour with dazzling brightness.

"Who's there?" she cried in a frightened voice.

Harz stood in the doorway, and she stared at him wildly.

"Why did you come out?" he said hoarsely. 'I didn't mean to see you—I never meant to see you; I only—ah! why did you come out?" He took a quick step, and lifted her hand.

"You have been crying! Tell me!"

Then suddenly the touch of her fingers, the shining in her eyes swept away his strength; he flung himself upon his knees by her side, and cried, "I love you!"

She caught his hand, and bent her forehead to it.

"What are you doing? Is it possible you love *me*," and he pressed his lips to her hair, the soft hair that seemed to give back fragrant kisses.

She raised her head at last.

"Always," she said; "when I was with you I felt something had come—as if it must stay for ever; and then—you went away! it's wonderful to think it meant this after all."

He bent lower, muttering:

"It will be hard for you—many hard things—and you are so little, so little and weak," but he felt the clasp of her hands tighten upon his shoulders.

"What must we do?" she whispered.

"Do! To-morrow I go to your father and ask him for you."

She looked at him, suddenly frightened.

"Ah! you won't tell him all you were telling me to-day; he won't understand."

"I must—I'm not ashamed."

"Must you? Oh! *don't*!"

He let go her hands.

"But of *course* I must!"

"Ah!" she cried, "I shall see you afterwards. I want you with me; I'm afraid."

Catching her again, he drew her close. She threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"Whatever comes!" she whispered, and gathering her dress in her hand, ran out into the darkness.

He stood breathless, straining his eyes, listening for her footsteps on the soft grass.

CHAPTER XII

CHRISTIAN woke with a smile on her lips. At breakfast she kept her head bent towards her plate, but in her attitudes, in the tone of her voice, in her eyes when she raised them, there was a happy and sweet seriousness, as if she were hugging close to her some holy thought. After breakfast she took a book and sat in the open window, whence she could see the entrance between the poplars. There was a breeze; budding roses on a tree close by kept nodding; the cathedral bells were in full chime, and bees hummed in the lavender bushes; soft clouds floated across the sky like huge, white birds.

Inside the room Miss Naylor in a staccato voice was reading French dictation, which Greta took down, one eye upon her pen, one eye upon Scruff, who lay in a chair with a black ear flapped over its arm, and his tan eyebrows quivering. He was in disgrace, for Dominique, coming unawares upon him in the kitchen, had seen him say his prayers in front of a cabinet pudding, and afterwards, with much rolling of the eyes, "go in" and finish it up.

Christian's lips parted; she put her book gently down, and walked bareheaded out on the path. Hartz was coming from the entrance. Her fingers touched his, and at the look she gave him he felt humbled.

"Remember!" she whispered, "I am all yours." Pressing her fingers tightly, he went on into the house.

The girl slipped back to her seat, and waited there with set lips. It seemed a long while before he came out; and when he did, he waved her back and hurried on, but she had a glimpse of his face, white to the lips through its tan. She leant against the wall, faint and sick, then flew past to her step-father's room.

Herr Paul was standing in a corner with the air of utter disturbance which comes to easy-going men when a wave from the sea of the unexpected has broken against them. His fine shirt-front was crumpled as if his bosom had heaved too suddenly under a violent emotion; his blue glasses dangled behind his back; his fingers were imbedded in his beard. He was fixing his eyes upon a point in the floor as though he expected an invisible something to explode and blow them all to fragments. In an arm-chair Mrs Decie, with half-closed eyes, was running the tips of her fingers across and across her brow.

Christian took two or three steps forward. "What have you said to him?" she cried.

Herr Paul regarded her with glassy eyes.

"What! *Mein Gott!* Here—your aunt and I—what?" he spluttered.

"What have you said to him?" repeated Christian.

"Said? The low-bred fellow! An anarchist! What? A beggar!"

Mrs Decie murmured, "Paul! Paul!"

Christian, trembling, said quietly, "Did you say *that* to him?"

"Hein! As for you—you are a disgrace. I should think so—the fellow!" He began to stride up and down the room, muttering, "Anarchist—outlaw—impudent beggar!"

The girl's figure quivered from head to foot.

"How dared you?" She covered her eyes with her arm and ran from the room, passing Miss Naylor and Greta, blanched and frightened, in the doorway. Upstairs in the bedroom she locked the door, and flinging herself on her bed, broke into a passion of weeping.

Herr Paul stopped short in his tramp, and fixing his eyes again upon a spot in the floor, growled:

"Ah! *Schön!* A fine thing this—hein! And what is coming? Will you please tell me? An anarchist! A beggar!"

"Paul! Paul!" murmured Mrs Decie again.

"Ah-h-h! Paul! Paul! And you!—and you!" pointing to Miss Naylor. "Two women with eyes! —with eyes—" He threw himself into a chair.

"There is nothing to be gained by violence," said Mrs Decie, passing her handkerchief across her lips. Miss Naylor, her thin, brown cheeks flushing, her fingers twining and interwining, advanced, and said with dignity in an agitated voice:

"I hope you do not — I am sure there was nothing that I could have prevented--I should be glad if that was understood." And with the pleasing glow of assertion running down into her toes, the little lady retreated, closing the door behind her.

"Ah-h! You hear!" said Herr Paul with violent sarcasm, "nothing she could have prevented! nothing she could—. *Enfin!* Will you please tell me what is to be done?"

Like most "men of the world"—whose philosophy is an outside creature of circumstances and things accepted—he found any deviation from the thin path of his convictions a dangerous and shocking thing, an intolerable bore. The fact that he spent his life laughing at convictions went for nothing; the matter had only to touch him personally, and the tap of laughter ran dry, the tap of anger overflowed. That anyone to whom he stood in the position of lawful guardian should marry anything but a well-groomed man, properly endowed with goods, properly selected for her, was beyond expression horrid. From his point of view he had great justification for horror; he could not be expected to know whether he had justification for horror from other points of view. His amazement had in it an element of the pathetic; he was like a child in the presence of something he absolutely could not understand. The interview had left him with a sense of insecurity which he felt to be unfair. He sighed.

The door was thrown open again, and Greta flew in, her cheeks flushed, her hair floating behind her, and tears running down her cheeks.

"Papa," she cried, "you have been cruel to Christian, the door is locked, I can hear her crying —why have you been cruel to her?" and without waiting to be answered, she flew out again.

Herr Paul seized his hair with both his hands.

"Ah! Ah! good! very good! my own child, you see! What next then?"

Mrs Decie rose languidly from her chair.

"My head is very bad," she said. She went across to Paul, and stood close to him, shading her eyes from the light, and speaking in a low voice:

"It is no use making a fuss—nothing can come of this; he hasn't a penny. Christian will have nothing until you die, which will not be for a long time if you avoid apoplexy."

At the last words Herr Paul gave a perceptible start. "Hum!" he muttered; it was as if the world were bent upon a series of brutalities. Mrs Decie went on, fixing her pale eyes upon him.

"Besides, if I know anything of this young man, he will not come here again after the words you spoke to him. As for Christian! you had better talk to Nicholas. I am going to lie down."

Herr Paul, nervously fingering the shirt-collar round his fat, rather short neck, repeated:

"Nicholas! certainly, Nicholas—a good idea—*ah! mais qu'elle diable a'affaire.*"

"French!" thought Mrs Decie as she left the room, "we shall soon have some peace. Poor Christian! I'm very sorry—but after all these things are only a matter of time," and she consoled herself somewhat with this generality.

For Christian the hours passed in a long nightmare of grief, shame, anger, of fear too—would he forgive? Would he be true to her? Or would

he go away without a word? Since yesterday it was as if she had stepped into another world, and had lost that world again. In place of that new feeling, intoxicating as wine, what was coming? What dreadful and bitter ending? The ending of a dozen words heavy and brutal as flung stones. A rude entrance into life, a life of facts, and primitive emotions.

After a time she rose and let Greta into the room, for the child had begun sobbing outside; but she would not talk, and sat hour after hour in the window with the air fanning her hot face, and the pain in her eyes turned to the sky and trees. Greta after one or two attempts at consolation sank on the floor, and remained there a long time, humbly gazing at her in silence that was only broken by Christian clearing her throat of tears, and by the song of birds in the garden. In the afternoon the child slipped away and did not come back.

Herr Paul after an interview with his brother-in-law had taken a bath and perfumed himself with much precision. At luncheon he caused it to be understood that, under these circumstances, a man's house was not even fit for a pig to inhabit, and shortly afterwards had betaken himself to the Kurhaus, whence he had not returned by dinner-time.

Before dinner Christian appeared. There was a bright spot of colour in each of her cheeks and dark circles under her eyes; she behaved, however, as if nothing had happened. Miss Naylor, strug-

gling between kind-heartedness and shock to the system, kept her eyes fixed on the tablecloth, rolled an immense number of little bread pills, looked at each one as it appeared with an air of pained surprise, and concealed it with difficulty. Mr Treffry coughed a good deal, and when he talked his voice seemed to rumble even more than usual. Greta was quite dumb, trying continually to catch Christian's eye; Mrs Decie alone seemed at her ease. After dinner Mr Treffry went off to his room, leaning heavily on Christian's shoulder. As he sank into his chair, he said to her:

"It won't do, Chris—give it up! it won't do! Seems good to you I s'pose, but you'll find there's a 'hole in the ballot.' Give it up! old girl—give it up!" Christian only shook her head.

Outside the room Greta caught her by the sleeve.

"Look!" she whispered mysteriously, thrusting a piece of paper into her sister's hand.

"What is it?" said Christian.

"It is from Doctor Edmund to me, but you must read it." Christian opened the note, it ran as follows:

"My Guide, Philosopher, and Friend,—I received your note with pleasure and misgiving. I went to our friend's studio; he was not in. Half-an-hour ago, however, I stumbled across him in the *Platz*. He is not quite himself; has had a touch of the sun—nothing serious. I took him to my hotel, where he is now in bed. If

he will only stay there he will be all right in a few days. In any event he shall fail to elude my clutches for the present.

"Convey my respects to your sister, and imagine me yours in friendship, philosophy, and guidance,

"EDMUND DAWNEY."

Christian read and re-read the note by the dim gleam of light that filtered into the passage from the open door of the dining-room. She turned to Greta:

"What did you say to him?" Greta handed her another piece of paper blotted and scrawled upon; Christian read:

"DEAR DR EDMUND,—We are anxious about Herr Harz. We think he is perhaps not very well to-day. We (I and Christian, you see) should like to know. You can tell us. Please shall you? GRETA."

Christian twisted the note in her fingers. "What made you write?" she said, looking down.

Greta gazed at her mournfully.

"I thought—Oh! Chris, come into the garden. I am so hot, and it is so dull without you," she whispered.

Christian bent her head forward and rubbed her cheek against Greta's hot face, then without a word ran quickly up the stairs and locked herself into her room. The child stood listening; when she heard the key turn in the lock she sank

down on the bottom step of the dark stairs with Scruff in her arms.

Half-an-hour later Miss Naylor carrying a candle found her there, fast asleep, with her head resting on the terrier's back, and some half-dried tears on her cheeks. . . .

Mrs Decie came out, also bearing a candle, and went to her brother's room. She stood in front of his chair, with her hands folded the one upon the other.

"Nicholas!" she said, "what is to be done?"

Mr Treffry poured whisky into his glass with an unsteady hand.

"Damn it! Con," he answered, "how should I know?"

"There's something in Christian that makes it dangerous to interfere. I know very well that I have no influence over her." The smile tightened round the corners of her mouth.

"By Jo-ove! Con," said Mr Treffry, "you're right there."

Mrs Decie's pale eyes, fastened on his face, seemed to force him to look at her.

"I wish you would leave off drinking that horrid whisky and listen to me. Paul is an element——"

"P-Paul," growled Mr Treffry, "is an ass."

"Paul," pursued Mrs Decie, "is an element of danger in the situation—any ill-timed opposition of his might drive her to I don't know what. Christian is gentle, she is what is called sympathetic, but thwart her, and she is as obstinate as——"

"You or I—leave her alone, I tell you!"

"I understand her character, but I confess that I am at a loss what to do."

"Do? d-do nothing!" He drank again.

Mrs Decie took up the candle.

"Men!" she said, with a mysterious intonation; and, raising her shoulders, walked out of the room.

Mr Treffry put down his glass.

"Understand?" he thought; "no, you don't understand, and I don't. Who understands a young girl? Unpractical baggage—all up in the skies. Understand? Moonshine! What's she see in the fellow?" He breathed heavily. "Chris! By heaven! I wouldn't have had this happen for a 'plum.'"

CHAPTER XIII

FOR many hours after Dawney had taken him to his hotel, Harz was prostrate with stunning pain in the head and neck. He had been all day without food, exposed to a burning sun, and suffering violent emotion. Movement of any sort caused him such agony that he could only lie in a sort of stupor, trying to count the green spots dancing about in front of his eyes. Dawney, who was continually in and out of the room, did everything for him. He found the intent shrewdness of the young doctor's calm, black eyes profoundly irritating. He felt grateful, but often wished him a hundred miles away.

Towards the end of the second day he was able to get up and move about. Dawney found him sitting in his shirt and trousers on the bed.

"Look here! my son," he said softly, "better tell me—do your stubborn carcase good."

Harz frowned.

"Doctor!" he burst out suddenly, "I must go back to work."

"Work," said Dawney deliberately, "be hanged; it's as much as your sight's worth."

"I must."

"My dear fellow, you couldn't tell one colour from another. Don't you know you just missed a bad sunstroke."

"It doesn't matter, I must do something; I can't sit here thinking."

Dawney hooked his thumbs into his waistcoat.

"You won't see the sun for three days yet if I can prevent it," he said.

Harz got up and walked feebly about the room.

"I can walk. I am going to my studio to-morrow. I will promise not to go out for three days. I must be where I can see my work. If I can't paint, I can draw; I can feel my brushes, move my things about. Here I only think and think—I shall go *mad*."

Dawney, taking his arm, began walking with him gently up and down.

"Steady!" he said, "it'll all dry straight. If I let you go there'll be no question of running out for any reason whatever, eh? Be a good chap; give me a chance! It's just as much to me to put you straight as it is to you to paint a decent picture. You go to bed; I'll have a carriage for you to-morrow morning."

Harz pressed his arm.

"Look! doctor, because I haven't a very good coat, because I haven't much money, because I've starved, because I come of the people. Ah!" he cried, "I see through him—I see through him to the very ground—this aristocrat. But I fight; I don't give her up, and I make a success. If she gives me up, that's another thing. I wouldn't have minded being refused by this aristocrat—I shall be known, I shall make a name, I believe in myself—but, *bei Gott!* He called me a beggar!—and I

couldn't answer him. You will tell her I don't give her up unless she wishes it; you will tell her that?"

Dawney nodded. Pity, concern, amusement seemed struggling for mastery in his black eyes.

"I'll tell her," he said, "but for goodness' sake, my dear chap, take it easy; I shall have you clean off your chump. Take it easy! Make allowances, can't you?"

"Allowance! If I had him in my hand I'd crush him like that—no, he is too mean." He sat down on the bed, holding his hands to his head.

"To-morrow I go to work," he said. "Tell her I don't give her up!"

Dawney waited a minute or two.

"Can you get to bed by yourself?" he said, pulling the shutters to, and lighting a candle.

"Yes."

"Well, I'll give her your message. Good-night, old chap," and soberly he left the room.

Outside he thought: "No! no more playing the good Samaritan; doesn't pay. Poor fellow! Glad he's not a regular patient; another of that sort—phew! It's like fingering a hedgehog, his *ego* sticks up all over him, he takes himself so beastly seriously. All the same I like him. He gets somewhere anyway. You can see the colour of his blood."

He took his hat and went out, walking with the ponderous airiness peculiar to him, and drawling displeasure at his rather inferior cigar.

"If I've got to play the dirty little messenger-boy," he thought, "I may as well get it over," and turned his steps towards the Villa. In the garden he stopped to finish his cigar. The further trees were fretworked black against the pale gold of the sunset; a huge moth, attracted by the tip of his cigar, came fluttering into his face. From the stables the wail of a concertina rose and fell.

"To give that message is the worst turn I could do either of them, the girl especially! Don't like it a bit," he mused. "He shouldn't have asked me! It's not the right thing to do by these people. Hang it! one ought to use one's own discretion in these things." He threw away his cigar, and thrusting his hands into his pockets, stood for some minutes staring at the house. Then he went to the door.

"I'd sooner—pay—a bill," he said to himself.

He was shown into Mrs Decie's room. She was holding a magazine rather close to her eyes, and received him with as great a show of relief as her philosophy permitted.

"You are the very person I wanted to see," she said.

He noticed that the magazine article was entitled "The Cult of Carlyle." "How does she persuade herself that she likes it?" he thought; "if I could only have her brain to cut up!"

Mrs Decie leaned forward, and projecting her chin in an upward look, said:

"You are a young man, but as my doctor I have a right to your discretion."

Dawney smiled; in his broad clean-shaven face

his features looked absurdly small, and his eyes held their look of calculation.

"That is so," he said with a slight bow.

"It is about this most unfortunate affair. I understand that Mr Harz is with you. I want you to use your influence to—to dissuade him from attempting to see my niece."

"Influence!" ejaculated Dawney, "you know Harz!"

Mrs Decie's eyes hardened.

"Everybody," she said, "has their weak points. This young man is open to attack from two quarters—his pride and his work. I am seldom wrong in gauging a character; these are vital spots, and they are both of the essence of this matter. I am sorry for him—but at his age, and living a man's life, these things—" Her smile was of an extra pallor. "I wish you could give me something for my head! It is foolish to worry about this sort of thing. Nerves! I suppose one can't help it. You know my opinion. That young man will go very far if he remains unfettered; he will make a name. You will be doing him a great service if you could show him the affair as it really is—a drag upon him, and quite unworthy of his pride. *Do* help me! You are just the man to do it."

Dawney threw up his head as if to shake off the impeachment; the curve of his chin thus displayed was imposing in its fulness, altogether he was imposing, giving an idea of capability. He said: "I will try if you like," and at the same time

thought: "This is altogether too much of a good thing; why the devil didn't they bring me up to say 'No.' Now I'm committed to both sides. Oh! hang it! I'll do nothing for any of them." He looked at her. She struck him as really scared, it was as if the mask of her smile had come a little awry, and failed to cover the four corners of her emotion; and he was puzzled. "I wouldn't have believed she had it in her," he thought. "One never knows. . . . It's a difficult business," he said; "if you will excuse me, I'll go and think it over."

Mrs Decie passed her hand over her brow.

"Thank you," she murmured, "so much! You are most kind."

As he passed the open door of the schoolroom an impulse made him look in. Christian was sitting there, a lighted candle by her side. He caught sight of her face, and it gave him a shock; it was so white, so resolutely dumb. A book lay open on her knees, but she was not reading; her eyes were fixed upon the wall with a frightened stare. He thought suddenly, "I shall be an utter cad if I don't give her that message," and, knocking on the door, went into the room. Christian rose.

"Miss Devorell," he said, "I've got something for you. I—I'll write it down."

Tearing a leaf from his pocket-book, he wrote hastily.

"There!" he said, putting it on the table.

Christian tried to speak, but her lips trembled so that she could not utter a word.

"Good-night!" he said, and walked from the room.

Three days later Harz was sitting in the window of his studio. Dawney had just left, having pronounced him fit to go out again. He was leaning dejectedly against the wall. No message had come from Christian. It was the first day he had been able to paint; and now, tired out, he stared through the dusk at the shadows of the rafters slowly lengthening. A solitary mosquito was humming, and two sparrows, that had built in a corner of the roof, chirruped sleepily and fluttered to and fro. Swallows darted across the opening of the window, dipping with a swift flirt of their blue wings towards the quiet water. The hush that had stolen over everything invaded his senses; he fell asleep with his chin drooping on his chest.

He woke startled; a dim impression was upon him of footsteps—of some near presence. In the pale glimmer from thousands of stars, the room was full of twisted, indefinable shapes. He struck a match and lit an old lantern. The flame darted forth, died away, flickered spirally, forcing its dim rays into every recess. He called out, "Who's there?" and a faint rustling seemed to answer. He peered about the room, then went to the doorway and put the curtain aside. A figure in a long cloak, standing at the head of the stairs, shrank against the wall. He could not see the face, for it was buried in the hands; only the shape of the arms, from which the cloak fell away, was visible.

"Christian!" he said, "is it you?"

Her hands dropped; she lifted her scared eyes.

"You have come to me?"

She ran past into the room; and when he had put the lantern down was standing at the window. She turned quickly to search his face with her eyes.

"I came to tell you! All these miserable days I've been thinking. Take me—take me away from here! Let me come with you!" and she slipped her hand into his.

"Do you mean it?" cried Harz.

"You said you would not give me up.

"Do you know what you are doing?"

She made a motion of her head.

"Yes, I know—I think with your thoughts; I love you!"

"You don't know what this means. Such terrible things to bear, things you know nothing about — hunger perhaps. Think, even hunger! And your people! They won't forgive—you will lose everything."

She shook her head.

"No! no!" she cried, clinging to him. "I must choose—it's one thing or the other. It's for the truth, and what's for the truth must be right. If you will take me I will be your wife."

"Ah! how I love you!"

"Give you up! I couldn't—I should be afraid. I should hate myself! Save me, dear! Make me true to what is best in me. This is the best"; she touched his face.

"There are other things besides; how can you come with me? We can't be married here."

Christian said, "I am giving my life to you."

"You are too good for me," said Harz brokenly "Look! the life you're going into—it's dark, uncertain, like that! Can you face it?" He pointed into the darkness.

A sound of footsteps broke the hush. The figure of a man appeared on the path below. He stopped, seemed to consider, vanished. They heard the sounds of groping hands, of a creaking door, of uncertain feet upon the stairs.

Harz seized the girl by the hand.

"Quick," he whispered, "behind this canvas."

Christian was trembling violently. She drew the hood of her cloak over her head. The heavy breathing and ejaculations of the visitor were plainly audible.

"He's there! outside! Quick!" and he looked at her. "Will you hide?"

She shook her head.

"No! no! I won't."

With a thrill at his heart he kissed her.

She stood, clutching her cloak to her breast. Harz walked towards the entrance. The curtain was pulled aside.

CHAPTER XIV

HERR PAUL, holding a cigar in one hand, his hat in the other, and breathing rather hard, bowed, and advanced unsteadily towards Harz.

"Pardon," he said, in a husky voice, "your stairs are steep, and passably, yes passably, dark; *mais, enfin! nous voilà!* I have ventured to come for a talk." His eyes fell upon the cloaked figure in the shadow.

"Ah! pardon! A thousand pardons. I had no idea. I beg you to forgive this indiscretion," he murmured, rubbing his hands together. "Admirable! I may take it that we have resigned our pretensions? Prrt! Charming! charming fellow! Since this lady is here, I have nothing to say, and can only beg a million pardons for my intrusion. With a thousand apologies, ah! Good-night!"

He bowed, drawing his heels together, and turned to go. Christian made an uneasy movement; a feeling of shamed jealousy had sent the blood flying to her cheeks. She took a step forward, letting fall the cloak from her face.

"Father!"

Herr Paul pirouetted.

"Good God!" he cried, dropping cigar and hat, and running his fingers through his hair, "good God!"

Christian clasped her hands.

"I came to tell him I will be his wife," she said.

The lantern flared suddenly and revealed Herr Paul with crimson, shaking cheeks.

"You came *here*," he stammered; "at night you came! Good God! You, the daughter of *my* wife," and his eyes wandered with a dull glare round and round the disordered room, "You! you!"

Harz, making a furious gesture, cried, "Take care! She is good as the angels. If there is one word against her——"

And the two men, within arm's length of one another, panted, staring into each other's eyes. A minute passed, and then, without warning, the lantern flickered and went out. Christian drew the cloak round her. Herr Paul's voice broke the silence; he had recovered his self-possession.

"Ah! ah!" he said mockingly. "Darkness! *Tant mieux!* the right thing for what we have to say to each other. Since we do not esteem each other it is well not to see too much."

"As you will," said Harz.

Christian came close to them. The men, becoming accustomed to the gloom, could just see her pale face and great eyes shining with tears. Her voice rang hard: "You can't expect *anything* from me—you insult him." Herr Paul waved his arm; from the darkness the gesture borrowed an impressive, annihilating effect.

"This is a matter, I believe, between two men," he said, addressing Harz. Christian drew back to

the entrance, and stood there holding the curtain in her hand. Herr Paul waited a minute.

"Since we are *alone*, then," he said, with emphasis, "let us come to the point. I will ask you—Do you know that Miss Devorell has no money till I die?"

Harz answered "Yes."

"And I am passably young! You have money then?"

"No."

"In that case you would propose to live on air, *hein!*"

"I propose to work."

"Ah, *Schön!* but calculated to increase hunger. You are prepared then to take Miss Devorell, a young lady accustomed to luxury, into places like—this," he peered about him, and sniffed; "into places that smell of paint, into the *milieu* of the people, into the society of Bohemians—who knows? Of anarchists perhaps?"

Harz clenched his hands.

"I answer no more questions," he said.

"In that event we reach the ultimatum," said the other, drawing back a step, and caressing his beard. "Listen, Herr outlaw! If you have not left the country by noon to-morrow you shall be introduced to the police."

Christian uttered a cry, and was silent again, holding her hands out in front of her.

In the room, cavernous, tinged with a bluish gloom by the starlight, the only sound heard was the short, hard breathing of the two men. Suddenly Harz cried:

"You are a coward—I defy you."

The other panted: "A coward! Ha! a coward! That is indeed the last word. By heaven! look to yourself."

Stooping and fumbling on the floor, he picked up his hat; when he had turned to the entrance Christian had vanished, and the sound of her hurrying footsteps was distinctly audible at the top of the dark stairs. Herr Paul stood still a minute.

"Look to yourself, my dear friend!" he said, in a thick voice, groping for the wall. Planting his hat askew on his head, he began slowly descending the stairs.

CHAPTER XV

NICHOLAS TREFFRY sat reading the paper in his room by the light of a lamp with a green shade; on his sound foot the terrier Scruff was asleep and snoring lightly—the dog habitually came down when Greta went to bed, and remained until Mr Treffry, the latest member of the household, retired.

The long window was open, a little river of light shone upon the verandah tiles, and, flowing beyond, cut the garden in two.

Mr Treffry dropped the paper, and pushed his glasses up on his nose.

A sound of hurried footsteps, a rustling of drapery, and Christian, running through the window, stood before him. She pressed her hand to her side. The big figure in the chair moved uneasily; a dumb fury of passion and alarm shone from the girl's eyes.

"Chris! I sa-ay, Chris! What is it?"

"Hateful! Hateful!"

"Chris! I sa-ay, Chris!"

"You don't understand! Nobody does; it's all hateful. He's insulted! threatened! and I love him—I love his little finger more than all the world."

Her passionate, trembling voice; her cheeks

flushed, then white; her shining eyes; her fingers pressed to her breast, seemed all unknown to him.

His profound discomfort found vent in the gruff words:

"Sit down, Chris!"

"I'll never speak to father again! There will be nothing left. Oh, uncle! I love him."

The old man, bulky and quiet, in the extremity of his disturbance, leaned forward in the chair, rested his great hands on the arms, and stared at her with eyes that held gleams of cynicism, of alarm, of pity. His restless fingers rose and fell with a measured tap on the wood, like the passage of his thoughts. . . .

"Chris is gone. Here's a woman; and, by Jove! I don't know her. How? Why? What's it all mean? I don't understand!" His lips moved under the heavy droop of his moustache. Between him and the girl's white face the fog of years was hanging.

"Oh! uncle! I love him." She sank upon her knees, and the touch of her hot cheek against his hand seared like a darting flame of memory, but the meaning in it eluded him; it seemed to mean nothing, only to irritate. His hand felt suddenly wet; there was meaning in that—something that brought a lump into his throat. He drew his hand sharply away, stared at it, wiped it with his sleeve, and laid it shaking on her shoulder.

"Da-amme, Chris! don't cry!" She seized and clung to it. The silent entreaty of her fingers filled him with sudden rage.

"What's the matter? How the devil can I do anything if you don't tell me what's wrong? Speak! can't y'?"

Pressing his hand against her cheek she looked up at him. Her eyes filled with tears, flashed, filled with tears again. The distress of the last days, the passion and fear of the last hour, the tide of all that new life stirring within, flowed from her in breathless words.

Mr Treffry started forward: "Wha-at? What d'ye say? Police! *Give him up?* No-o! . . . By Gad!!"

There was a minute of silence, when the fluttering of a moth round and round the lamp could be plainly heard.

Mr Treffry, raising himself by the arms of the chair, cleared his throat sonorously; his hand fumbled with the chain hanging round his neck. He began pacing the room, and the sound of his heavy footsteps seemed to the girl like the beating of a drum of despair. Burying her face in her hands she sobbed.

Mr Treffry shouted: "Stop! He sha'n't, if I'm a gentleman!" He touched a hand-bell. Dominique appeared. "Tell the groom to put the horses to, and bring 'em round at once; and hi! look you! bring my old boots; we drive all night."

Christian raised her head. He was not looking at her, but at the light, muttering to himself. His bent figure looked huge, with body and legs outlined by the lamp glow, shoulders and head towering into the shadow. For a second a smile played about his

lips and in his eyes, lurked in the deep folds of his cheeks—a fugitive gleam of devilry. He made an effort to straighten himself.

"By Jo-ove, Chris!" he said, "he shall have a run for his money, or I'm a Dutchman."

The gleam died out again in his eyes, they stared sombrely at the girl from under their ragged brows.

"It's more'n he deserves—don't know why I do it; it's more'n *you* deserve, Chris. Get you pen and paper—tell him he's to come along with me. A ba-ad business—a ba-ad business!—and, look here, don't y' thank me or by George! I don't go." He turned his back on her, and walked into his bedroom.

Christian rose; she stood by the writing-table with her hands clasped in front of her.

Dominique appeared, holding a pair of boots.

"M'mselle Chris," he said in a suffering whisper, "what is this? Is it a caravan? We work well, we of my country, but we don't love this—to run about all night." He spread the fingers of his disengaged hand, and the corners of his dark moustache curled with a grin of disgust. The girl did not move. "M'mselle Chris! M'mselle Chris!" he said, coming nearer, "are you ill?" He saw her face, and crept back into the shadow.

Nicholas Treffry reappeared in a long overcoat, hatted and gloved, a large flask in one hand, a number of air-cushions in the other. He crossed the room and stood towering over her.

"Well! Chris; got the note?" She shook her head, pressing her hand to her throat.

"Well!—well! Blow 'em up," he said gruffly, throwing the air-cushions at Dominique and, filling his flask at the table, began laughing unsteadily.

"I sa-ay! look at that da-am silly dog!" Scruff, in his intuition of trouble he could not understand, was begging quietly by himself in a corner of the room; and Dominique, blowing up the cushions, stood glaring at him with glowing slits of eyes, out of the olive moon of his distended face.

Mr Treffry pulled on his boots, and walked heavily into the passage. The carriage was already before the door; the lamps burning like coals; the quick toss of the horses' heads, the pawing of their feet on the gravel, gave the feeling that a single live creature waited to leap forward into the dark. He placed his foot on the step.

"Sha'n't want you," he called to the groom. "Get up, Dominique."

Christian came running, and thrust a little packet into his hands.

"Give him that," she said, clinging to his arm with sudden terror. "Oh, uncle, do take care!"

"Ah-h! See here, Chris, if I do this for you—" He broke off. For a moment of mutual self-forgetfulness they stood looking wistfully at each other.

Mr Treffry shook his head and, gathering up the reins, clambered ponderously into his seat.

"Don't you fret, old girl, don't y' fret! Wo-a, mare!"

The carriage with a jerk plunged into the darkness, curved with a crunch of wheels; vanished,

swinging between the black tree-pillars of the entrance.

Christian covered her eyes with her arm, straining to catch the failing rattle of hoofs. Down the passage came a flutter of white garments, soft limbs were twined about her, some ends of hair fell across her face.

"What is it, Chris? Where have you been? Where is Uncle Nic going? Do tell me!"

Christian extricated herself.

"I don't know," she cried passionately. "I don't know myself—I don't know anything."

Greta stroked her face.

"Poor Chris!" she murmured. Her bare feet gleamed, her hair shone golden against the white of her nightdress. "Come to bed, poor Chris!"

Christian began to laugh strangely.

"You're like a little white moth, Greta. Feel how hot I am! You'll burn your wings."

CHAPTER XVI

In the studio Harz had flung himself, fully dressed, upon his mattress. The flame of his anger had burnt out, and left only the feeling that he would rather die than yield. Presently he heard footsteps ascending; he waited sullenly. Someone was in the room.

"*M'sieu!*"

He recognised Dominique; the man's face, illumined by a match, wore an expression of ironical disgust.

"Mr Treffry," he said, "makes you his compliments; he says there is no time to waste. Ah!—a—it is nothing! We drive, we are a caravan to-night, m'sieu, that is all."

He came close to Harz, and there was a silence. The match burnt Dominique's fingers; he struck another.

"That is kind of your master," said Harz. "Tell him I'm in bed."

"Ah, *m'sieu*," said Dominique grimacing, "I must not go back with that answer."

"Stay here then," cried Harz. "I will paint you by lamp-light—you'll make a fine study," and he broke into a laugh. He lighted the lantern, and began hunting for a bit of canvas.

Dominique watched him, shifting continually from

one foot to the other, like a cat upon hot bricks. At last he said, raising his hands with a motion of despair :

" *M'sieu*, since you will not come, I am to give you this," and handed him the little packet.

Harz untwisted the paper and took from it a ring. He held the paper to the light.

" Take the lantern," he said ; " I'm coming."

The deep bell of a clock struck eleven as he went out through the gate by the end of the bridge. In the shadow of a house the horses were pawing the stones and twitching their ears. He stood irresolute ; from within the dark cave of the phaeton hood Mr Treffry's voice said gruffly :

" Come along, sir, or there'll be the 'devil to pay and no pitch hot!'"

Harz flung his knapsack in ; as he dived under the hood his companion's great figure swayed forward, the whip-lash slid softly along the flank of the off horse, and the carriage, swinging, rattled over the stones. The two men exchanged no words, but Mr Treffry called out, as if by an after thought :

" Hallo, Dominique!" and Dominique's voice, polite, shaken, and ironical, answered faintly from behind :

" *M'v'là, m'sieu!*"

They passed through a long street of silent houses, dark shapes cut clear against the black strip of gleaming sky ; in a café men, sitting at little tables under the blaze of lamps, turned and stared, with glasses arrested at their lips. The narrow river of sky spread suddenly into a vast and limpid

ocean trembling with stars; they came out upon the road leading southwards.

The horses "broke"; the tramp of their hoofs rang out sharp and clear through the still night.

Mr Treffry, leaning forward, took a pull.

"Woa—mare! Dogged does it," and the near horse, throwing up her head, whinnied faintly; a tiny fleck of foam drifted back into Harz's face.

Sullen and apathetic, he had not moved. He had come upon an impulse, because she had told him, not of his own will; he was angry with himself, raging that he had allowed anyone to render him a service. Wounded self-esteem had set a sting firmly in his heart, and worked it to and fro at every conceivable angle.

Mr Treffry began talking to his horses; they seemed to know, flinging up their heads with a jingle of bits and a flurry of manes.

Insensibly, the swift motion through velvet blackness, where on either hand the swayed lamps threw flying splashes of golden light, the air rippling and rustling in his face—air that had kissed the tops of mountains and stolen a spirit from them; the snort and snuffle of the horses, the crisp rattling of their hoofs, began to produce in Harz a feeling of gladness, before which his moodiness melted as the space melted in front of them. His companion's profile, rugged, impassive, lengthened by the tuft on his chin, became, in its statuesque sternness, fascinating to him, fascinating as the grey strip of road they were devouring, as the purple mass of mountains under which it

ran, fascinating as is everything immoveable and dimly seen. He caught himself suddenly thinking of Dominique, scared, grinning and disgusted, within a foot of them, and as secluded as though he had been in another hemisphere. He began to laugh, possessed by a strange spirit of exhilaration.

Mr Treffry, leaning forward, murmured shakily :

" Eh-h ! you beauties ! good going — twelve miles an hour, I'll bet you a ha-at."

Harz started, gripping the side rail, and throwing his other hand out towards the horses.

Old Treffry turned his head with a gesture as if he had suddenly become aware of his presence.

" Eh-h ! By Jove ! Show you better than this presently ; bit of a slope coming, get a good fifteen there. Haven't had 'em out for three days. Wo-a mare ! steady ! You ' brayging ' little fool ! "

" Where are you going ? " cried Harz. " Why are you taking me ? You don't like me ; you don't owe me any favour."

Mr Treffry bit his moustache.

" I sa-ay, look here, Mr Harz ! I'm an old chap, and an old chap may do a stoopid thing once in a while."

" Stop the horses ! " cried Harz. " I hate to take anything—I'll meet what comes."

Mr Treffry stared at the face close to his own.

" Stop ! by Jove, no ! " He flourished the whip. " I believe you—I believe you, and I like y' the better for it, but you see there's Chris to be thought of ; an' look here, Mr Harz, we an't at the frontier yet, not by fifty mile ; it's long odds we

don't get there, so what's the good of talking?" Shifting the reins into his whip hand he pointed to the left.

Harz caught the glint of steel, a glint that ran alongside, flickering and failing in the darkness—will o' the wisp lines of commerce and control.

A tingling, the sigh of telegraph wires, fluttered above them ; the road curving crossed the line.

"Ay!" muttered Mr Treffry, "I hear 'em, but if we get away up the mountains we'll do yet." They had begun to rise a hill, the horses dropped into a slow trot. Mr Treffry leant back, and rummaging in his pocket produced his flask."

"Not ba-ad stuff, Mr Harz—try it! You won't?" He tilted his head, coughed, drew in his moustache with his lower lip. "Mother's milk!" he explained.

They kept rising. Below them the valley was lit by a web of milky mist like the glimmer of dew upon grass. The road made the hem of a giant country where mountains ruled, and human beings tucked their dwellings under the lea of knolls, out of the ken of winds.

Into both the men driving along that road—men so unlike in face, age, stature, thought, life—Nature had flung a morsel of the defiance of those crags, a morsel of big spirit ; each felt drawn to the other, as if, in the rolling of the wheels, the snort of the horses, the huge dark space, the huge uncertainty, they had found something familiar, something in common. Neither confessed ; both felt it. They looked at each other's faces from time to time—faces gleaming pale out of the gloom ; a young face,

eager and restrained, an old face, grim, yet wistful. The slope had yielded; the horses stopped, drawing their breath in long pants, and the steam from their flanks and nostrils rose into the darkness in a warm cloud, with an odour of glue.

"Good la-ass! Good la-ad! Get your winds! You smoke, Mr Harz? Good for the nerves. Bit of a hill here—I like 'em to have their heads, don't you? Never held with brakes so long as their forelegs stand." The glowing tip of the cigar, trembling in his hand, seemed to point eagerly in the direction of invisible and courted chances. Harz experienced a slight and pleasant shock, the tingle of his fibre to the presence of danger—a danger that did not seem to lie in front or to lurk behind, but to distil from the old man's voice. He smiled; and, hearing Dominique tap his feet up and down on the board behind, took unconsciously a tighter grip of the rail. They started again, Mr Treffry leaning forward, face and hat like a giant black mushroom. The wheels jolted on a rubble of loose stones; the horses strained asunder with flying hoofs and heads bent back; and the carriage, gathering the speed of a bird, sped downwards, leaping at the darkness.

Rocks, trees, dwellings, became flying black shapes; once a lighted house gleamed and vanished like a winked eye. The clink and clatter of hoofs; the flirt of dust and pebbles; the frisk of the side lamps touching the earth on either hand with an orange blink; the snort and the steam, and the men behind them, were mixed in a wheeling hoop of

motion through blue blackness. To those men the world rocked and swayed; forms danced up, were flung flat again; voices seemed to scream; their seats sank under them, and rose like boats breasting a billow. Only the stars stood still.

Once Mr Treffry, turning a little in his seat, muttered apologetically in a jolted voice:

"Bit out o' hand, by Jo-ove!"

They seemed to Harz to be quite out of hand. He had an intense desire to shout, like a child over a new and exhilarating toy.

Suddenly they dipped with a swoop, a head-long dive into darkness; hoofs scrambled; the carriage swayed as if it would fly in pieces; a lightning slither, a mad snorting, and, with a jerk, blackness straightened itself again. Harz lifted his voice in a shout of pure excitement. Beside him, Mr Treffry howled shakily, and from behind arose an ironical wail. The hill was over, the horses were cantering with a free motion like creatures of the wind, and the old man and the young shot side-long, ashamed glances at each other.

CHAPTER XVII

MR TREFFRY said with a sort of sheepish laugh:

"A near go, eh-h? You like it? Wonderful sure-footed these horses. You drive? No? That's a pity! Broken most of my bones at the game—nothing like it, nothing like it!" He was silent again, shaking his head, and ruminating. Both men seemed to wait for the other to speak; that shout—a momentary glimpse of each other's natures—had brought them closer; and each was conscious now of a respect he had not felt before. Mr Treffry began humming, and suddenly broke into words:

"You've got pluck—I wonder you ain't ashamed. I ask you, is it the square thing? A bit of a girl like Chris! with a lot of hifalutin' notions! And what have you got for her? What are you going to give her? Yourself, eh! I don't say it's bad, but it ain't enough; mind you this, Mr Harz, six months after marriage, one of us's much the same as another—a selfish lot of beggars." He flicked the whip forward: "We won't talk about the business we're on now, though that ain't pleasant; but, look here, you're not of her blood, nor of her way of life, nor anything—it's taking too many chances—and," his big hand groped about and

came down on the young man's knee, "I'm fond of her, you see—I'm fond of her."

Harz was silent, staring fixedly at the horses' manes that resembled the spume of waves in the darkness; at last he said:

"I love her; if you were in my place would *you* give her up?"

Mr Treffry groaned. "The Lord knows!" he muttered; and drawing the whip-lash through and through his fingers began humming again. Harz went on:

"I sha'n't always be poor. I believe in myself. Men have made themselves. Failure! When a man has no such word, there's no such thing. It's all softness with you—suppose she suffers a little! Will it do her any harm? I say it's good to fight, there's no love without it."

Mr Treffry sighed.

"Brave words, sir! But, by George! the words of a very young man." He was seized by a sudden fit of coughing: "Brave words! and you'll pardon me, if I'm too old to understand 'em, when they mean Chris."

He pulled the horses up, and peered under his hand into the darkness.

"We're going through this bit as quiet as we know how; if they lose track of us here it's all to the good. Douse the glim Dominique!" The Luganese appeared at the side of the carriage. "So-ho, my beauties!" said Mr Treffry under his breath, and the horses, arching their necks, began to pace forward at a walk. The muffled beat of

their hoofs in the dust hardly broke the hush. Mr Treffry pointed.

"Forty odd mile to the frontier over the Rolle, but we'll do 'em—we'll do 'em."

They began to pass white-washed houses that seemed to lean against each other as if whispering ghostly evidence of their stealthy progress; a great frog was croaking loudly and reproachfully out of a little runlet by the roadside; there was a faint, spicy whiff of lemons. Suddenly, and at a curl in the road, the village church towered towards the stars; in front of it, like devotional sentinels, two cypress trees, with a something of secret and Jesuitical mockery in their attitude, bent a little towards the carriage, inviting confession. Mr Treffry flicked his whip.

"Phew! Smotheration!" he grunted; "that's over."

The horses sprang forward; they had a glimpse of the winding road. Then trees began; trees running past on either side, high as towers, dark like a wall, fragrant with hot perfume; trees clear-cut against the sky, opaque and purplish below, save where a birch stem floated by, wraith-like.

"You won't then, eh?" said Mr Treffry abruptly. In the gruff words there was a note of entreaty. "It means a lot to us, does Chris's luck."

"Ah!" said Harz with trembling lips, "to you, and to *him*! and I am nothing! Do you think *I* don't care for her happiness? It's a crime for me to love her, *hein*? You call yourselves men of the world! What do you know?"

Mr Treffry said: "I know the value of my niece."

Harz bent forward. "Because I have no money. Ah! I think it is always *money*. But I tell you, you are as narrow as this road."

Mr Treffry made no reply, clucking to his horses, and now and then eyeing his companion sideways. At last he spoke:

"Straight from the shoulder anyway! I could give it you back again, young man, but I'm not going to. My niece was born and bred a lady, by Jove! an' I ask you what are you going to give her?"

Harz made a quick movement.

"If she marries me," he said, "she'll come into my world. You think," he went on with a choke of passion in his voice, "that I—that I'm common."

Mr Treffry gripped him by the arm and growled:

"I don't! You're a damn fiery young fool." They leaned forward in the darkness for a sight of each other's eyes, then fell back silent.

It seemed the last word had been said; both stared out at the trees. To Harz thoughts seemed to become woven into the motion, to revolve in a vicious wheel, of which Christian, Mr Treffry, his own work, self-esteem, passion, were merely the spokes—a wheel rolling slowly over his power of action.

A light breeze had risen at last; the whispering in the trees, the drowsy drum of their progress through air heavy with the pine scent and dust the dull hoof-tramp, formed a lullaby to which he fell asleep. When he woke it was to the same

tune, but varied by Mr Treffry's uneasy snoring; the reins hung loose, and, peering, he saw Dominique shuffling along at the horses' heads. He joined him; one on each side, without speaking or exchanging a look, they plodded methodically up and up. A haze had begun to bathe the trees, the stars burnt dim, the air was colder. Mr Treffry woke coughing, and suddenly began a loud and discordant humming. The whole thing seemed like a nightmare to Harz, an interminable experience of muffled sounds and shapes, of perpetual, purposeless motion, conceived in darkness, carried out in darkness, to end in darkness. The carriage emerged for a space out of woods on to the mountain-side, and suddenly the day broke. Heralded by the snuffle of the horses, the light dawned in a glimmering struggle over caves of mystery, over a crowned chaos of lines and shadows; glowed pale like mother-of-pearl till the stars faded; flared suddenly in a smouldering zigzag of gold along the mountain-tops, and flung out little islands of cloud; soared high over the forests, setting a girdle of pink around the sky. From a lake, curled in a hollow like a thick patch of smoke, came the cry of some great bird. A cuckoo started a soft mocking; and within two yards of the carriage a lark flew up, but was soon lost to sight, though the beads of his song kept dropping upon them. Beasts and men stood still, drinking in the air—the air sweet of snows and dew, and bearing with it the faintest tingle of running waters, rustling leaves, tumbling bells.

The night had made havoc in Mr Treffry's appearance; his large-brimmed hat was grey with dust; his cheeks were of a brownish purple colour; he kept sucking in his moustache. His eyes, too, stared with a painful concentration. Harz asked anxiously how he felt.

"Eh?" he said defiantly. "Well, quite we-ell. Why not?" and raising his head he laughed a shaky laugh. "Not too pretty, though, I daresay. Call a halt and give the horses their grub. A big pull, they want all they can get. Can y' find some water hereabouts, Mr Harz? There's a bucket in behind. Can't get about myself this morning; make that lazy fellow of mine stir his stumps."

He had drawn off one of his boots and stretched the foot out on a cushion. Harz pointed to it. Mr Treffry swore in his beard: "Ever had the gout? No? Ah! Well, don't!" and began humming.

"You're not fit to go further," cried Harz, "you're ill!"

"Ill!" replied Mr Treffry with scorn. "Teach your granny to lap ashes! I know when I'm ill—no more ill than you, though *you* look pretty bad, I must sa-ay."

"I don't stir till you go back," persisted Harz.

Mr Treffry made no reply to this, except to thrust forward his chin. It was a gesture that carried more of obstinacy than a dozen speeches. Harz looked at him for a minute, then catching the bucket from Dominique made off in search of water. When he came back the horses were

feeding out of a sort of india-rubber trough slung to the pole; they stretched their heads towards the bucket, greedily pushing each other's noses out of the way. He looked about him with a sudden feeling of giddiness.

The flame in the East had vanished in a genial radiance, the young larch trees received upon their spikes a flecking of tender crimson, and to look below into the valley was like plunging the eyes into liquid amber. Everywhere too, on the level of the sun's girdle, far and near, were threads of water and threads of snow, and little threads of dewy green, spun, and glistening like the half of a gossamer's web.

Mr Treffry called out:

"Mr Harz, will y' give me your arm. Like to shake the reefs out o' me. Steady! When one comes to stand over a bit at the knees, it's no joke going down hill." He groaned as he put his foot to the ground, and swayed backwards and forwards, gripping the young man's shoulder like a vice. Presently he lowered himself on to a stone and stretched his foot out.

"'All over now,' as Chris 'd say when she was a little 'un; nasty temper she had — kick and scream on the floor, by Jo-ove! never lasted long though—'Kiss her! take her up! show her the pictures!' Amazing fond of pictures!" He spoke feebly, and took a long pull at his flask. "My throat," he said, as his chin returned to right angles, "is as dry as jowders. I sa-ay, what about the doctor? Whisky at four in the morning!

Well! thank the Lord! We haven't got 'em always with us; never thought much of 'em. Some of y'r ca-areful men, directly they've a toe-ache must have a doctor, think they're goin' to die; my brother-in-law, Paul, if he happens to sneeze, can't sleep for nights. They made me have a doctor, the women did, the women y' know—not half the man I was, since." He shook his head lugubriously, and took another pull at the flask. "Couldn't make me give up whisky—stuck to it like old boots, it suits me. We'll get on directly—through Predazzo in half-an-hour—Paneveggio by seven o'clock—funny names these places—good goin', ain't it? These horses are rare bits of stuff."

He bent forward on his stone; one hand plucked continually at his side, the flask shook in the other. He was grey from head to foot with dust, and beads of perspiration kept rolling off his forehead.

Harz had dropped on to another stone at a short distance. The excitement and fatigue of the long night coming after his illness had made his feet feel like lead. His head too was whirling; in answer to Mr Treffry he shook it discontentedly, swaying slightly as he sat and muttering continually:

"No! no!"

His eyes, staring at the old man, seemed to have receded into his head. They waved their fists at each other; and Dominique, adjusting the horses' bridles, watched the incomprehensible performance with an amazed and sallow face.

Suddenly both made an effort to rise, neither succeeded; both grinned sickly grins, and the sun straightway proclaimed himself over the horizon with a yellow stare into their eyes.

It seemed to Harz that some one said: "Must get on—I say! get on—young fool!" That the trees were walking at him, turning round, dropping curtseys, yellow from the roots up; that everything was yellow, his own feet yellow. He determined to use them. Somebody was opposite to him jumping up and down on yellow feet like a bear, a grey bear—with a hat—Mr Treffry—silly old man! Stupid —ill—obstinate old man! He called out: "If you won't go—I leave—you!" and stood up; some one cried: "Ha-alloo!" and Mr Treffry seemed to fall, to disappear in a glare of yellow.

When Harz came to himself a hand was pouring liquor into his mouth, a white and wet thing was muffled round his brows, there was a noise of humming and hoofs very familiar. They were moving; where? Nowhere in particular, but moving! Mr Treffry loomed up bulky by his side, smoking a cigar. How did he get there, whom he had last seen falling into a yellow chasm? Talking, too, in disjointed words: "Low trick!—Paul! bit of my mind!" void of meaning, but soothing. Then, as if a curtain were snatched aside the vision before him was clear again, his mind righted itself. He pulled off the bandage, and sat up; the horses broke into a trot. The carriage was winding between uneven, black-eaved

houses, past doorways from which goats and cows were issuing in desultory fashion, with a clamour of bells. Black-eyed boys, and here and there a drowsy man with long, cherry-stemmed pipe swinging in his teeth, stood aside to stare.

"Predass!" growled Mr Treffry with a flick of the whip. He seemed to have taken a new lease of strength, and, like an angry old dog, looked about him from side to side, as who should say: "My bone! Now let's see who's going to touch it?"

The carriage swung out of the channel of the long street, glowing in the early sunshine; and, with a magic suddenness entombed with its tail of dust in the gloom of tall trees, became once more lonely, discreet, fugitive, along a road cleaving upwards a wilderness of moss-grown rocks, a maze of dewy stems, through which the level sun had not yet driven paths. Dominique came round to the side of the carriage, bearing the appearance of one who has seen better days, and a pot of coffee he had brewed upon a spirit lamp. His swallow-tailed coat, for want of time unchanged, against a back-ground of primæval rock, was a jest neatly underlining the irony with which he announced that breakfast was served.

The horses paced slow with heaving flanks; their ears twitched continually. Once Mr Treffry said remorsefully:

"If *I* can see this through, they can; I know 'em—I know 'em I tell y'; get along, my beauties!"

The sun wore up in the heavens, struck slanting through the tree-tops, and Mr Treffry's strength began to ebb again. He seemed to suffer great pain ; often he dropped the reins and bent forward, as if the agony in his side were doubling him together. He made no complaint, but stared fiercely along the road. The trees ceased ; the sunlight streamed down with a blinding, unchecked glare ; and the road flattened itself triumphantly into the pass, stony and grey, where nothing grew but edelweiss and alpen rose.

"Jump up!" cried Mr Treffry hoarsely, "we'll make a finish of it." He gave a pull at the reins. The horses tossed up their heads, and the bleak pass with its circling crown of jagged peaks slipped away under their tired hoofs.

Cut into a spur of rock, some houses came into sight. Between them Mr Treffry, his purple face fixed in a grin, urged at speed, and beyond, slanting in long angles down the mountain-side. He brought up with a jerk in the half shade of spruce trees, where a mule track joined the road.

"That's all I can do for you," he said in a husky voice barely heard above the panting of the horses and the buzz of flies. "Keep this track down to the river—go south—you'll be in Italy in a couple of hours. Get rail at Feltre. Money? Yes? Well, good luck to you!" He held out his hand ; Harz gripped it. "Give her up, eh?"

Harz only shook his head, with sudden tears in his eyes.

"No? Well, I warn y' it'll be 'pull devil, pull

ba-aker,'" and clutching the tuft of his beard Mr Treffry bent forward. For an instant he seemed to muster his strength, and tried to straighten himself: "Good luck to you!" he said majestically, gathering up the reins.

Harz watched his figure huddled again under the hood, as the carriage turned slowly round and began toilfully the ascent.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT the Villa Rubein people went about stealthily, avoiding each other as if they had been detected in conspiracy. Miss Naylor, who for an inscrutable reason had put on her Sunday frock, a purple, relieved at the chest with black and bird's-eye blue, conveyed an impression of trying to count a thing, which—like the Irishman's chicken—ran about too fast for her. Greta asked what she had lost, and she was heard to mutter words that sounded like "Mr—Needlecase."

Christian, with big circles round her eyes, sat at her little table all the morning. She had had no sleep. About noon Herr Paul came into the room whistling uneasily, and seeking to dry his hands in a pocket handkerchief. He watched her for a couple of minutes, after which he went upstairs to his bedroom, took off all his clothes, flung them one by one passionately into a footbath, and went to bed.

"I might be a criminal!" He invoked Providence tempestuously, while the buttons of his garments rattled against the tin of the bath. "Am I her father, *hein!* have I authority? Do I know the world? Bsss! I might be a frog!" Mrs Decie, having caused herself to be formally announced,

presently found him smoking a big cigar and counting out loud the flies on the ceiling.

"If you really have done this, Paul," she said in a restrained voice, "you have done a very unkind thing to Christian, and what is worse you have made us ridiculous; but, perhaps, you have not done it."

"Done it?" cried Herr Paul with a dreadful stare at the ceiling, "I have done it, I tell you, I have done it—I have done it——"

"Very well, you have done it; and why, pray? What conceivable good was there in it? I suppose you know that Nicholas is driving him to the frontier. Nicholas is probably more dead than alive by this time; you know his state of health."

Herr Paul's fingers came, exasperated, from underneath the bedclothes, and ploughed up his beard.

"Nicholas is mad—the girl is mad—you are all mad! Bah! I wish to smoke, I wish to sleep, I do not want you here," and he began ostentatiously to count the flies. "I will *not* be made angry; I will *not* be worried—I am not fit for it." His prominent brown eyes stared wildly about the room, as if looking for some way of escape.

"If I may prophesy, you will be worried a good deal," said Mrs Decie coldly, "before you have finished with this affair."

The anxious, uncertain glance which Herr Paul gave at these words aroused within her an unwilling feeling of compunction.

"You are not made for the angry father of the

family," she said. "You had better give the position up, Paul; it does not suit you."

Herr Paul groaned.

"You had better give it up, but," she added consolingly, "I suppose it is not your fault; these things are all arranged for us."

The door behind her was opened, and Fritz announced, with the air of one who is saying the right thing:

"A gentlemans of the police to see you, sir."

Herr Paul bounded in his bed.

"Keep him out!" he cried. Mrs Decie, handkerchief to lips, disappeared with a rustling of silk; in her place stood a stiff figure in blue. . . .

The morning dragged itself away without any one being able to settle to anything, except Herr Paul, who was settled in bed. As befitted in a house that seemed to have lost its soul, manifestations of the family soul, such as meals, were neglected, even by Scruff.

About three o'clock a telegram was handed to Christian; it contained these words, "All right, self returns to-morrow, Treffry." After reading it she put on her hat and went out, followed by Greta, who, watching till she thought she would not be sent back, ran up from behind and pulled her softly by the sleeve.

"Let me come, Chris—I shall not talk."

The two girls went on together across the bridge—an old woman selling oranges to a group of chattering factory girls nodded, and called "*Kuss die Hand!*" after them. Christian's eyes were fixed

upon the ground. If she could only do something for him! When they had gone some distance in the direction of Gries, she stopped, and turning to Greta, said:

"I'm going to take his pictures, and keep them."

"Oh!" said Greta timidly, "yes."

"If you are afraid," cried Christian, beginning to retrace her steps, "you had better go home."

"I am not afraid, Chris," said Greta meekly.

Neither girl spoke again till they had recrossed the bridge, and taken the path along the wall. Over the tops of the vines the heat was dancing.

"Look at the sun-fairies on the vines!" said Greta to herself.

Christian began to run. It seemed that her resolve had brought her nearer to him, it was something tangible, something to help; to think of disappointment was intolerable.

At the old house they stopped; and Christian, breathing quickly, pushed the door; it was immovable. They stared at each other.

"Look!" said Greta, "they have screwed it," and she pointed out three large screws with the tip of her finger. Christian stamped her foot.

"We mustn't stand here," she said, "let us sit on that bench and think."

"Yes," murmured Greta, "let us think," and, dangling an end of her hair in her hand, she regarded Christian with her wide blue eyes.

Christian cried at last, "I can't think while you are staring like that."

"I was thinking," said Greta humbly, "if they have screwed it up, perhaps we shall screw it down again; there is the big screw-driver of Fritz."

"It would take a long time; people are always passing."

"People do not pass in the evening," mused Greta, "because the gate at our end is shut."

Christian rose. "We will come this evening, just before the gate is shut."

"But, Chris, how shall we get back again, when the gate is shut?"

"I don't know; I mean to have the pictures."

"It is not a high gate," murmured Greta below her breath.

After dinner the two girls went away to their room, Greta bearing with her the screw-driver of Fritz. At dusk they slipped downstairs, and out of the house.

They arrived, panting, into the shadow of the doorway. The only sounds that came to them were from distant barking dogs, and sleepy bugles blowing the nine o'clock call.

"Quick!" whispered Christian; and Greta, with all the strength of her small hands, began to turn the screws. It was some time before they yielded, the third having so peculiar an obstinacy that Christian took the screw-driver herself, and with a passionate energy gave the screw the starting twist.

"It is like a pig—that one," murmured Greta mournfully, rubbing her wrists. The opened door revealed the gloom of dank, untenanted rooms and

twisting staircase, then fell to behind them with a clatter. Greta gave a little scream and caught her sister's dress.

"It *is* dark," she gasped. "Oh, Chris, it *is* dark!"

Christian groped for the bottom stair with her foot; Greta felt her arm shaking.

"Suppose there is a man to keep guard! Oh, Chris, suppose there are *bats*!"

"You are a baby," said Christian in a tremulous voice. "You had better go home."

Greta choked a little in the dark.

"I am—not—going home, but I'm afraid of bats and devils. Oh, Chris, aren't you afraid?"

"Yes," said Christian, "but I'm going to have the pictures."

Her cheeks were burning; she trembled all over. Having found the bottom step she began to ascend, taking Greta, adherent to her skirts, with her.

The haze above was a beacon of hope to the child, who, beyond all things, hated darkness. The curtain across the doorway of the loft had fallen down, and there was nothing to veil the grey emptiness of the room revealed by fading twilight.

"There's nobody there, you see," said Christian.

"No-o," whispered Greta doubtfully; and, running to the window, stood clinging to the wall, like one of the bats she dreaded.

"They have been here," cried Christian angrily. "Look! they have broken this." She pointed to

fragments of a plaster cast upon the floor. Out of the corner she pulled canvases set in rough, wooden frames, dragging them with all her strength.

"Help me!" she cried, "it will be dark directly." They collected a heap of sketches and three large pictures, piling them in front of the window, and peering at them in the fast-failing light.

Greta said ruefully:

"Oh, Chris, they *are* heavy ones, we shall never be able to carry them, and the gate is shut!"

Christian took a pointed knife off the table. "I shall cut them out of the frames," she said. "Listen! What's that?" It was the sound of whistling, and it stopped underneath. The girls, clasping each other's hands, dropped on their knees.

"Hallo!" called a voice, "Hallo!" Greta crept to the window and, placing her face level with the floor, peeped cautiously over. "Hang the beggar!" said the voice, and there were sounds of retreating footsteps.

"It is only Dr Edmund; he doesn't know, then!" she whispered. "I shall call him."

"Don't!" cried Christian, catching her by the dress.

"He would help us," said Greta reproachfully, "and it would not be so dark if he were here."

"I don't choose," muttered Christian, with burning cheeks; and, sitting down again, she began tenderly handling the pictures and feeling their edges with her knife.

"Chris! suppose anybody should come!"

"The door is screwed," answered Christian absently.

"Oh! Chris, we screwed it unscrewed, anybody who wishes shall come."

Christian, leaning her chin in her hands, gazed thoughtfully at her; the girls' faces, for the darkness, were quite close together.

"It will take a long time to cut these pictures out. You must screw me up and go home; in the morning you must come early when the gate is open, unscrew me again, and help carry the pictures." Greta did not answer at once. At last she shook her head violently:

"I am afraid," she gasped.

"We can't both stay here all night," said Christian; "if anyone comes to our room there will be nobody to answer; we can't lift these canvases over the gate. One of us *must* go back; you can climb over the gate—there is nothing to be afraid of." Greta pressed her hands together.

"Do you want the pictures badly, Chris?" she said.

Christian nodded.

"Very badly, Chris?"

"Yes—yes—yes!"

Greta remained sitting where she was, and shivered violently, as an animal shivers when it scents danger. At last she rose slowly to her feet: "I am going," she said with despair. She paused at the doorway, and turning round said solemnly: "If Miss Naylor shall ask me where you are, Chris, I shall be telling a story."

Christian started.

"I forgot that—oh! Greta, I am sorry; *I* will go instead."

Greta took another step—a quick one: "I shall die if I stay here alone," she said, nodding her head; "I can tell her that you are in bed; then you must go to bed here, Chris, so it shall be true after all."

Christian came close, and threw her arms about her: "I am *so* sorry, darling, I wish I could go instead. If you have to tell a story, I would tell a clean one straight out."

"Would you?" said Greta doubtfully.

"Yes, I would."

"I think," said Greta to herself, beginning the descent of the stairs, "I think I will tell it *my* way." She shuddered, and went on groping into the darkness.

Christian clasped her hands to her breast, and listened for the sound of the screws. They turned slowly back into their holes, with a grating menace of danger, uncertainty, and solitude.

Sinking on her knees she began to rip open the canvas of a picture with the point of her knife. Her heart throbbed stressfully; at the stir of wind-breath, or any note of distant clamour she stopped, and held her breathing. No sounds came near; she toiled on, tearing the stiff canvas away from the frames, trying only to think that she was at the very spot where last night his arms had been round her; and how long ago it seemed! She was full of vague terror, over-mastered by the supreme dark-

ness, dreadfully alone. The glow of resolution, so new to her, seemed suddenly to die down in her heart and leave her cold.

She would never be fit to be his wife, to give him everything! at the first proof her courage was failing! She set her teeth, slitting away and tugging; and suddenly she felt a kind of fierce exultation, as if she, too, were entering life, were knowing something within herself that she had never known before. Her fingers hurt, and the pain gave her pleasure; her cheeks were burning; her breath came fast. They could not stop her now! This feverish task in the darkness was her baptism into life. She finished; and rolling the pictures together, tied them with cord. She had done something for him! Nothing could take that away. She had a part of him—he was bound to her! This night made him hers! Let them do their worst! She lay down on his mattress and fell asleep . . .

She was awakened by Scruff's tongue licking her face. Greta was standing by her side.

"Wake up, Chris! the gate is open." In the cold, early light she seemed to glow with warmth and colour; her eyes danced, she tugged at Christian.

"I am not afraid now; Scruff and I sat up all night, to catch the morning. I—*think* it was fun; and oh! Chris," she ended with rueful lips and a gleam of triumph in her eyes, "*I told it.*" Christian hugged her.

"Come—quick! there is nobody about; is that bundle the pictures?"

Each supporting an end, the girls bore it down stairs, and set out with their corpse-like burden along the wall-path between the river and the vines.

CHAPTER XIX

HIDDEN by the shade of rose-bushes Greta lay stretched at length, cheek on arm, sleeping the sleep of the unrighteous. Through the flowers the sun touched her, made bold to flick her parted lips with a kiss, to spill upon her here and there a withered petal. In a denser islet of shadow Scruff, concerned as to his toes and the buzzing of a fly, pretended vigilance. His head lolled drowsily in the middle of a snap, and snapped in the middle of a loll.

At three o'clock Miss Naylor came out, carrying a basket and pair of gardening scissors. She lifted her skirts and stepped precisely, to avoid the thin lakes of water left on the grass by the garden hose; in front of a rose-bush she dropped her skirts, and began to snip off the shrivelled flowers. The little lady's grey head, and thin, brown face sustained the shower of sunlight unprotected, and by their freedom and the thoughtfulness of her eyes were stamped with a gentle dignity.

Presently, while the scissors flittered in and out of the leaves, she began muttering to herself:

"If girls were more like what they used to be, this would not have happened. Perhaps we don't understand, it's very easy to forget." Burying her nose and lips in a crimson rose she sniffed daintily.

"Poor, dear girl! It is such a pity his father is—is——"

"His father is a farmer," said a sleepy voice behind the rose-bush. Miss Naylor leaped.

"Of c-course! How you startled me, Greta! A farmer—that is—an—an agriculturalist."

"A farmer with vineyards—he told us, and he is not ashamed. Why is it a pity, Miss Naylor?"

Miss Naylor made her lips thin.

"For many reasons, of which you know nothing."

"That is what you always say," pursued the sleepy voice, "and that is why, when I am to be married there shall also perhaps be a pity."

"Greta!" cried Miss Naylor, "it is not proper for a girl of your age to talk like that."

"Why?" said Greta, "because it is the truth?"

Miss Naylor made no reply to this, but in a vexed manner cut off a sound bud, which she hastily picked up and regarded with contrition. Greta spoke again:

"Chris said: 'I have got the pictures, I shall tell'; but *I* shall tell you instead, because it was I that told the story." Miss Naylor stared at her, wrinkling her brows and holding the scissors ajar. "Last night," began Greta slowly, "I and Chris went to his studio and took his pictures, and so because the gate was shut I came back to tell it; when you asked me where Chris was, I told it, because she was in the studio all night, and I and Scruff sat up all night, and in the morning we brought the pictures, and hid them under our beds, and that—is—why—we—are—so—sleepy."

Miss Naylor peered over the rose-bush, a nice question of inches that could not subdue her dignity.

"I am surprised at you, Greta; I am surprised at Christian, more surprised at Christian. The world seems all topsy-turvy."

Greta, a sunbeam entangled in her hair, regarded her with eyes inscrutable and innocent:

"When you were a girl, I think you would be sure to be in love," she murmured drowsily.

Miss Naylor, flushing a deep pink, snipped off another bud.

"And so, because you are not married, I think you would still be in love."

Miss Naylor's hand hovered over the bush, and the scissors hissed like barber's scissors suspended over a head. Greta nestled down again.

"I think it is wicked to cut off all the buds," she said, as she shut her eyes.

Miss Naylor continued to peer over the rose-bush, and her thin face, close to the glistening leaves, had become oddly soft, pink and girlish. At a deeper breath from Greta, the little lady placed the basket on the ground, and, halting the scissors, began to walk up and down, followed dubiously by Scruff, the whites of whose eyes formed interrogation marks in his face. At one of the turns she met Christian coming from the arbour, a skein of wool and knitting-needles in her hand.

Miss Naylor, shy and friendly, slipped her arm through the girl's, and drew her gently to walking

back and forth across the grass; and though she made no remark, her lips kept opening and shutting, like the beak of a bird that contemplates a worm.

Christian spoke first:

"Miss Naylor, I want to tell you please——"

"Oh! my dear, I know all about that; Greta has been in the confessional before you," and she gave her arm a squeeze. "Isn't it a beautiful day? did you ever see the Rosengarten so clearly?" She pointed eastwards, where the great peaks glittered in the sun like giant crystals.

"I like him better with the clouds about him."

"Well!" assented Miss Naylor nervously, "he certainly is nicer with the clouds about him. He looks almost hot and greasy, doesn't he? . . . My dear," she began, with a number of little squeezes, "we all of us—we all of us——"

Christian's eyes grew bright, her lips trembled.

"My dear," began Miss Naylor again, "I am far—that is, I mean, to all of us at some time"—a big squeeze—"and then you see—well—it is hard!—it becomes hard!"

Christian shrank, but kissed the gloved hand resting on her arm. Miss Naylor bobbed her head; a tear trickled gently off the end of her nose.

"Do let us wind your skein of wool!" she said with immense gaiety.

Some half hour later Mrs Decie, standing in the shade of the verandah, called to Christian across the lawn.

"My dear!" she said, "come in here a minute, I have a message for you."

Christian went; her heart was beating but there was an odd, set look about her mouth and chin.

Her aunt was sitting with her back to the light, tapping a bowl of gold-fish gently with the tip of one polished finger-nail; the room was mysteriously cool. She thrust her face a little forward at the girl, and held out a letter: "Your uncle is not coming back to-night," she said.

Christian took the letter thus curtly worded in a thin toppling hand:

"*Auer*, vi. 15.

"DEAR CONSTANCE,—Can't get back to-night. Sending Dominique for things. Tell Christian to come over with him for night if possible.—Yr aff. brother, NCHLAS TREFFRY."

"Dominique has a carriage here," pursued Mrs Decie; "you will have nice time to catch the train. Give my love to your uncle. You must take Barbi with you, I insist upon that." She rose unexpectedly from her chair and held Christian's hand: "My dear! you look very tired, very—and ill. I don't like to see you look like that. Come! Come!" She inclined her pale lips until they met the girl's cheek.

As Christian left the room she sank back in her chair, with a crease in her forehead, and began languidly cutting a magazine: "Poor Christian!" she thought, "how hardly she takes it, I am very sorry for her; but perhaps it is just as well, as

things are turning out. Psychologically it is interesting."

Christian found her things packed, and the two servants waiting for her. In a few minutes they were driving to the station. She made Dominique take the seat opposite.

"Well?" she said.

Dominique bowed; his eyebrows twitched, and he gave a deprecating smile:

"*M'mselle*, Mr Treffry told me to hold my tongue."

"But you can tell *me*, Dominique; you know Barbi can't understand."

"To you, *m'mselle*," he answered, with an elaborate gesture of one accepting fate; "to *you* then, who will doubtless forget all I shall tell you—my master is not well; he has terrible pain here; he has a cough—he is not well at all—not well at all." A sharp feeling of dismay seized upon her.

"We were a caravan for all that night," Dominique resumed with lugubrious nods. "In the morning by noon we ceased to be a caravan; *M'nsieu* Harz took a mule path, he will be in Italy—certainly in Italy; as for us, we came back to Pane Veggio, and my master went to bed. It was time; with his clothes I had much trouble, his legs were swollen. In the afternoon came two *signore* of the police on horses, red and hot; I persuaded them how we were at San Martino, but as we were not there they came back angry—*Mon Dié!* as angry as two cats. It was not good to meet them—but when they went to my master I was outside

Si! Si! There was much noise—much noise. I cannot tell what was said, but at last the two *signore* came through the door, and went away in a hurry." Dominique's features became fixed in an ironical grin ; he rubbed the palm of one hand with a finger of the other. "Mr Treffry made me give him much whisky afterwards, and he had no money for the hotel bill—that I know because I paid it. Well! *m'mselle*, to-day he would be dressed, and very slowly we came as far as Auer ; there he could do no more, so he went to bed. He is not well at all!"

Christian had a heavy sense of foreboding and self-distrust ; the rest of the journey to Auer was made in silence, except when Barbi, a country girl, filled with the delirium of railway travel, sighed : "*Ach! gnädiges Fräulein!*" looking at Christian with her pleasant eyes.

Arriving at the little hotel Christian went at once to her uncle's room. It had been darkened by the closing of the shutters, and smelt slightly of beeswax.

"That you, Dominique?" said Mr Treffry's voice from a far corner.

"No, I!"

"Ah! Chris, glad to see you. Give us some of that stuff in the jug there, will y', old girl?"

Christian made him out, dressed in a blue flannel gown, with a rug over his feet, and lying on a couch that had been artificially lengthened by a chair ; the arm he extended for the glass issued many inches from its sleeve, and showed the corded

veins of his wrist. Christian, settling his pillows, looked anxiously into his eyes.

Mr Treffry coughed.

"I'm not quite the thing, Chris," he announced apologetically. "Somehow I'm not quite the thing. I'll come back with you to-morrow—be glad to get back."

"Let me send for Dr Dawney, uncle?"

"Eh! What d'you take me for, Chris? No! no!—plenty of him when I get there. Very good young fellow as doctors go, but can't stand his p-puddin's, Chris—slops and puddin's—puddin's and slops; and a lot of trumpery medicine on the top of 'em. I'll get you to send me Dominique, old girl—put myself to rights a bit." He fingered his unshaven cheek, and clutched the gown together on his chest. "Got this from the landlord—a funny old pump!" he muttered. "When you come back we'll have a little talk, eh?" and he gave her a shrewd glance from under his brows.

She came into the room an hour later, and he was asleep. Watching the folds of his cheeks twitch with uneasy breathing, she wondered what he would tell her.

He looked so ill! And suddenly she realised that she was not thinking of him. When she was little he would take her on his back; he built cocked hats for her and paper boats; he was never tired of having the newspaper knocked out of his hand; he taught her to ride; slid her between his knees; gave her things without number; took payment in kisses. And now he was ill, and she was

not thinking of him! He had been all that was most dear; before her closed eyes would only come the vision of Harz.

Mr Treffry woke suddenly and said:

"Not been asleep, have I? Fact is, the beds here are hard—'nfernally hard, Chris."

"Uncle Nic, won't you give me some news of him?"

"Eh-h! I was coming to that. Safe into Italy; they an't very keen after him, it's so long ago, you see; a half an' half business; and I've—squared 'em. Now look you, Chris; come over here!"

Christian came close, and he took her hand in his fingers.

"I'd like to see you p-pull y'self together a bit. 'Tisn't so much the position, that don't amount to much with me; 'tisn't so much the money, because after all there's always mine—" Christian shook her head and would have spoken. "But," he went on with shaky emphasis, "there's the blood, and that's a serious thing; an' there's this 'nfernal socialis'—this p-political business; an' there's the sort of life, an' that's a serious thing; but—what I'm coming to is this, Chris—there's the man." Christian drew away her hand. "Look here, Chris! I'm an old chap and fond of you, an' I'm going to say out what I think. He's got pluck, he's strong, he's in earnest; but he's got a dam' bad temper, he's an egotist, and—he's not the man for you. If you marry him, Chris, as sure as I lie here you'll go to the wall. You're not your father's child for nothing; clean

Devonshire bred he was, soft as butter; my mother was a Devonshire woman too; you're inbred to it, Chris, d'ye see, inbred to it. You didn't know y'r Uncle Jan; died before you were born—finest man God ever made, but a soft spot in him — the Cornish blood couldn't pull *him* through. I've nothing to say against the breed in its place, best breed in the world next to the Cornish, but take it out of its place, Chris, it's like mixing red earth and ironstone; don't blend! what's more, the ironstone comes out on top." He dropped his head back on the pillows, and, stretching out his hand for the glass, said wistfully, "Take my word for it, old girl, there's a hole in the ballot."

Christian, staring over his head at the wall beyond, said quietly:

"I *can't* take anyone's word for it, uncle."

"Eh-h? that's Jan all over," muttered Mr Treffry irritably, "you've enough of the Cornishman in you to make you as obstinate as the devil; but obstinacy ain't strength, Chris; an', look here! you'll give up everything to him, you'll be crucky-ing down to lick his shoes, and mind you this, you'll never play anything but second fiddle in his life. He'll always be first with himself, he an' his work, or whatever he calls p-painting p-pictures; an' some day you'll find it out, and you won't like it, and I don't like it for you, Chris, and that's flat." He wiped his brow where the perspiration stood in thick beads.

Christian said, "You don't understand; you

don't believe in him; you don't see! In him there is what I want, truth, strength, all that I think is best in life. He is going to be great, and I want to belong to him; even if he fails I want to belong to him. If I do come after his work! If I do give him everything, and he can't give all back! I don't care. He'll give what he can; I don't want anything more. If you're afraid of the life for me, uncle, if you think it'll be too hard——"

Mr Treffry bowed his head. "I do, Chris," he said quietly.

"Then," cried Christian, "I hate to be wrapped up in cotton wool; I want to breathe. If I come to grief it's my own affair, my own fault—nobody need care."

Mr Treffry's fingers sought his beard.

"Ay, ay, Chris!" he said with dignity, "ay, ay! Give us a kiss, old girl, I'm a bit tired."

Christian sank on her knees.

"Oh, uncle, I'm a selfish beast! I'm a selfish beast!"

Mr Treffry laid his hand against her cheek. "I think I could do with a nap, Chris," he said.

Swallowing a lump in her throat she stole out of the room.

CHAPTER XX

By a stroke of fate Mr Treffry's return fell upon the psychological moment when Herr Paul, in a suit of rather bright blue, was starting for Vienna.

When he saw the carriage appear between the poplars he became as pensive as a boy caught stealing cherries. Pitching his hat-box petulantly to Fritz, he recovered himself, however, sufficiently to whistle while Mr Treffry was being assisted into the house. Having forgotten his anger, he was now only anxious to forget its effects ; and in the glances he cast at Christian and his brother-in-law there was a kind of sullen entreaty which seemed to say : " For goodness' sake don't put me in a passion again ! " He came forward directly, and remarked in a jovial tone :

" *Ah ! mon cher !* you return ; I put off my departure then. Vienna must wait for me, that poor Vienna," and hastened to lend his arm.

" Thank y', Paul," said Mr Treffry, and Herr Paul, noticing the extreme feebleness of his movements, exclaimed with genuine concern :

" What is it ? The gout ? My God !—the gout ! " and, disappearing into his room, spent five minutes amongst bottles, at the end of which time he followed to Mr Treffry's room bearing a whitish liquid in a glass.

"There!" he said, "good for the gout—good for a cough—good for everything!" Mr Treffry sniffed at it, drained the glass, and sucked his moustache.

"What is it?" he said, "b-better stuff than the doctor's, and uncommon like gin, Paul." With a motion of his hand he stopped Christian, who was moving towards the door.

"Stop, Chris," he said, "shake hands, you two!"

Christian looked from one to the other; at last she held out her hand to Herr Paul, who brushed it with his moustache, and regarded her as she left the room with a complicated expression on his face.

"My dear!" he began, "you support her in this—this execrable affair? You forget my position, you make me ridiculous—absurd—funny. I have been obliged to go to bed in my own house, absolutely to go to bed, because I was in danger of becoming funny."

"Look here, Paul!" said Mr Treffry with gruffness, "I won't have Chris bullied. If anyone's going to bully her, it's me."

"In that case," returned Herr Paul sarcastically, "I will go to Vienna."

"You may go to the devil," said Mr Treffry, "an' I tell you what, in my opinion, it was low to set the police on that young chap; it was 'pindy,' Paul; a low trick!"

Herr Paul divided his beard carefully into two, and appeared to consider; at last he took a seat

on the edge of a chair, and, placing his hands on his parted knees, said :

" I have regretted it since—*mais que Diable?* He called me a coward—it is very hot weather ! there were drinks at the Kurhaus—I am her guardian—the affair is a very beastly one, you know—there were more drinks—*enfin !*" and he rose, shrugging his shoulders. " Adieu ! my dear, I shall be some time in Vienna ; I need rest." He walked to the door, humming a tune, and beating time to it nervously with his cigar. " Adieu ! adieu ! Be good ; get well ! I will buy you some cigars in Vienna," and through the door, adroitly shut upon any possibility of answer, he chanted the " Soldier's March " from Faust. Mr Treffry moved his head uneasily like an animal in pain. Presently he lay back against the cushions, listening to the tick of the clock at the end of the room, the cooing of pigeons upon the verandah, a door opening in the distance, a treble voice heard for a moment. His head drooped forward ; across his face, gloomy and rugged, a thin line of sunlight fell like the stroke of a whip-lash.

The clock suddenly stopped ticking ; and outside, as if by accord, the pigeons rose with a flutter of wings and flew off. A silence as of death clung to the room. With a startled and heavy movement Mr Treffry raised himself ; his fingers kept cramping and uncramping themselves upon his chest. He tried to get on to his feet and reach the bell, but could not, and sat on the side of the couch with heavy drops of sweat rolling off his forehead, and a

well remembered and horrible feeling of suffocation in his chest. Each unrecorded second seemed an immense space of time, full of cold, solid loneliness, and of that burning oppression in his chest. He tried again to reach the bell; he tried to call out, his breath refused him, and he sat still, alone with a thought that made him cold.

"I'm done for," he muttered, "by George! I'm done for." His eyes, under the folds of their lids, were glazed and fixed in a heavy stare. He covered them with his hand. The door was opened; a voice from behind said:

"How are you, sir; can we have a look at you?"

Mr Treffry did not stir. A hand was placed on his shoulder.

"Ah! d-doctor, b-bear a hand, there's a good fellow."

Dawney caught him under the arms, and, propping him against the cushions, loosened his shirt. Receiving no answer to his questions he stepped in alarm towards the bell. Mr Treffry made a feeble sign.

"Look here!" he said, struggling with his breath, "let's see what you make of me."

He shut his eyes. When Dawney's examination was over he looked up.

Dawney took a breath.

"Yes," he said, touching his side, "there's trouble here, of course."

Mr Treffry broke in with a husky whisper: "Out with it, doctor, don't humbug me."

Dawney bent down, and took his wrist.

"I don't know how the devil you've got into this state, sir," he said with the brusqueness of emotion; "you're in a bad way. It's the old trouble again, you know what that means as well as I do—all I can tell you is I'm going to have a big fight with it. It sha'n't be my fault, there's my hand on that."

Mr Treffry lay for a minute or two with his eyes fixed on the ceiling; at last he moved his hand, and tugging at his beard, said: "I want to live. D'ye hear, doctor? I've g-got to——"

"Yes—yes."

"I feel better now; don't make a fuss about it! Patch me up a bit! My niece! I've got to—you understand? Patch me up a bit! eh, d-doctor?"

Dawney nodded. "One minute," he said, "there are a few things I want." He went out. A moment later Greta stole in on tiptoe. She bent over the sofa till the ends of her hair touched Mr Treffry's face.

"Uncle Nic," she said in a whisper. He opened his eyes.

"Ay—ay! Greta."

"I have come to bring you my love, Uncle Nic, and to say good-bye, because I'm going to Vienna. Papa says that I and Scruff and Miss Naylor are going to Vienna with him, we have had to pack in half-an-hour; in five minutes we are going to Vienna, and it is my first visit there, Uncle Nic."

"Ay—ay! to Vienna!" repeated Mr Treffry

slowly; "a long way. Don't you have a guide, Greta, they're h-humbugs."

"No, Uncle Nic," said Greta solemnly.

"Draw the curtains, old girl, and let's have a look at you. Why-y, you're as smart as ninepence!"

"Yes," said Greta with a sigh, and touching the buttons of her cape with tender fingers; "I'm smart because I'm going to Vienna, but I'm sorry to leave you, Uncle Nic."

"Are you, Greta, are y', old girl?"

"Yes—but you will have Chris, and you are fonder of Chris than of me, Uncle Nic."

"Well! you see, Greta, I've known her longer."

"Perhaps when you have known me as long as Chris you shall be as fond of me."

"Ay," said Mr Treffry slowly, shading his eyes; "*when* I've known you as long—m-may be."

"While I am gone, Uncle Nic, you are to get well, because you are not very well."

"What p-put that into your head, Greta?"

"If you were well you would be smoking a cigar, because it is just three o'clock; and Dr Edmund told me not to make a noise. I give you three kisses, one for myself, one for Scruff, and one for Miss Naylor."

She kissed him three times and stood upright again, a tremulous and joyful gravity in her eyes and on her lips.

"Good-bye, old girl; take ca-are of yourselves; and d-don't have a guide, Greta, they're humbugs."

"No, Uncle Nic." She stood listening.

"There is the carriage! to Vienna, Uncle Nic—think!" The dead gold of her hair gleamed in the doorway. Mr Treffry raised himself feebly on his elbow.

"Give us one more, old girl; for l-luck."

Greta ran back.

"I love you very much, Uncle Nic." She kissed him, and backed slowly to the door, then, turning, flew like a bird into the passage.

Mr Treffry fixed his eyes upon the ceiling.

CHAPTER XXI

AFTER many days of hot, still weather, the wind had come, and whirled corkscrews of dust along the parched roads. The leaves were alive with a million flutterings, like tiny wings. Round Villa Rubein the pigeons were flighting uneasily, but all the birds were very silent. Late in the afternoon Christian came out upon the verandah, reading a letter :

"DEAR CHRIS,—We are here now six days, and it is a very large place with many churches. In the first place then we have been to a great many, but the nicest of them is not St Stephan's Kirche, it is another, but I do not remember the name. Papa is out nearly all the night ; he says he is resting here, so he is not able to come to the churches with us, but I do not think he rests very much. The day before yesterday, we, that is papa, I and Miss Naylor went to an exibition of pictures. It was quite beautiful and interesting (Miss Naylor says it is not right to say 'quite' beautiful, but I do not know what other word could mean 'quite' except the word quite because it was not exceedingly and not extreemly). And oh ! Chris, there was one picture painted by *him*, it was about a ship without masts—Miss Naylor says it is a barge, but I do not know what a barge is—

on fire and floating down a river in a fog. I think it is extremely beautiful. Miss Naylor says it is very impressionistick—what is that? and papa said 'Puh!' but he did not know it was painted by Herr Harz, so I did not tell him.

"There has been also staying at our hotel that Count Sarelli, who came one evening to dinner at our home; but he is gone away now. He sat all the day in the winter garden reading, and at night he went out with papa. Miss Naylor says he is unhappy, but *I* think he does not take enough exercise; and oh! Chris, one night he said to me, 'That is your sister, Mademoiselle, that young lady in the white dress? Does she always wear white dresses?' and I said to him, 'It is not always a white dress, in the picture it is green, because the picture is called "Spring"'; but I did not tell him the colours of all your dresses because he looked tired. Then he said to me, 'She is very charming.' So I tell you this, Chris, because I think you shall like to know. Scruff has a sore toe, it is because he has eaten too much meat.

"It is not nice without you, Chris, and Miss Naylor says I am improving my mind here, but I do not think it shall improve very much; because at night I like it always best, when the shops are lighted, and the carriages are driving past, then I am wanting to dance. The first night papa said he would take me to the theatre, but yesterday he said it was not good for me, perhaps to-morrow he shall think it good for me again.

"Yesterday we have been in the *Prater*, and saw

many people, and some that papa knew; and then came the most interesting part of all, sitting under the trees in the rain for two hours because we could not get a carriage (very exiting).

"There is one young lady here, only she is not any longer very young, who knew papa when he was a boy. I like her very much, she shall soon know me quite to the bottom and is very kind.

"The ill husband of cousin Teresa who went with us to Meran on my birthday and lost her umbrella and Dr Edmund was so very sorry about it, has been very much worse, so she is not here but in Baden. I wrote to her, but have no news, so I do not know whether he is still living or not, at any rate he can't get well again so soon (and I don't think he ever shall). I think as the weather is very warm you and Uncle Nic are sitting much out of doors. I am sending presents to you all in a wooden box and screwed very firm, so you shall have to use again the big screw-driver of Fritz. For Aunt Constance, photograhs; for Uncle Nic, a green bird on a stand with a hole in the back of the bird to put his ashes in, it is a good green and not expensif, please tell him, because he does not like expensif presents (Miss Naylor says the bird has an inquiring eye—it is a parrat); for you, a little brooch of turquoise because I like them best; for Doctor Edmund, a machine to weigh medicines in because he said he could not get a good one in Botzen, this is a very good one, the shopman told me so, and is the most expensif of all the presents —so that is all my money, except two gulden. If

papa shall give me some more, I shall buy for Miss Naylor a parasol, because it is useful and the handle of hers is 'wobbely' (that is one of Dr Edmund's words and I like it).

"Good-bye for this time. Greta sends you her kiss.

"*P.S.*—Miss Naylor has read all this letter (except about the parasol) and there are several things she did not want me to put, so I have copied it without the things, but at the last I have kept that copy myself, so that is why this is smudgy and several words are not spellt well, *but all the things are there.*"

Christian read smiling, but when she put the letter away in her pocket, she seemed to lose hold of a talisman, and her face was troubled. A sudden draught under the verandah blew her hair about, and from within Mr Treffry's cough came to mingle with the soughing of the wind; the clouds were fast blackening. She turned back into the house, and sitting down at a table rested her chin on her hands. After some minutes she took a pen and wrote, slowly at first, then faster:

"My Friend,—Why haven't you written to me? It is so long to wait. Uncle says you are in Italy —it is dreadful to know nothing for certain. I trust you, you would have written if you could; and I can't help thinking of all the things that may have happened. I am very unhappy. Uncle Nic is ill; he will not confess it, but that is only

his way; he is *very* ill. Though perhaps you will never see this, I must write all I feel, it seems easier, more honest. Sometimes I feel that I am brutal to be always thinking of you, scheming how to be with you again, when he is lying there so ill. You don't know how good he has always been to me; it is terrible that love should so pull one apart. Surely love should be beautiful, peaceful; but instead it is filling me with bitter, unhappy, wicked thoughts. I love you—and I love him; I feel as if I were torn in two. Why should it be so? Why should the beginning of one life mean the end of another, one love the destruction of another? I don't understand. The same spirit makes me love you and him, the same sympathy, the same trust—yet it seems that I am committing a crime in loving you. You know what he thinks—he is too honest not to have shown you. He has talked to me; in a way he likes you; but you are a foreigner, he says your life is not my life. 'He is not the man for you!' those were his words. He doesn't talk to me now, but when I am in the room he looks at me—that's worse a thousand times; when he talks it rouses me to fight, when it's only the look in his eyes, I'm a coward at once; I feel I would do anything, anything only not to hurt him. Why can't he see? Is it because he is old and we are young? The worst is this, he may consent, but he will never, never see; it will always hurt him.

"I want to tell you everything; I have had worse thoughts; sometimes I have thought that I

should never have the courage to face the struggle against everything which you have to face. Then I feel quite broken; it is like something giving way in me, as if my mind fell sick; then I think of you, and it is over again; but it has been there and I am ashamed—I told you I was a coward. It's like the feeling one would have going out into a storm on a dark night, away from a warm fire, only it is of the spirit not of the body, and so worse. I had to tell you this; you mustn't think of it again, I mean to fight it away and forget that it ever was there. But Uncle Nic, what am I to do about him? I hate myself because I am young, and he is old and weak —sometimes I seem to hate him for the same cause. I have all sorts of thoughts, and always at the end of them, like a dark hole at the end of a passage, the thought that I ought to give you up. Tell me, ought I? I want to know, I want to do what is right, I still want to do that, though sometimes I think I am all made of evil.

"Do you remember once when we were talking you said, 'Nature always has an answer for every question, you cannot get an answer from laws or conventions or theories or words, but you will get it from nature.' What do you say to me now; do you tell me that it is *nature* to come to you in spite of everything, and so that it must be right? I think you would; but can it be nature to do something which will hurt terribly one whom I love and who loves me? If it is—nature is

cruel. I suppose that is only one of the 'lessons of life,' it is what Aunt Constance means when she says 'Life is a perpetual paradox, or we couldn't get on at all'; she doesn't really mean anything because she doesn't feel; but I am beginning to see that everything *has* its dark side, I don't think I ever believed that before.

"I am sure that Uncle Nic in his heart dreads the life for me; he doesn't understand (how should he?—he has always had money) how life can be tolerable without plenty of money—it is horrible the accident of money should make such a difference in our lives. Because I am sometimes afraid myself, I can't out-face that fear in him; I think he sees the shadow of his fear in me, his eyes seem to see everything that is in me now; the eyes of old people are the saddest things in the world. I am writing like a wretched coward, perhaps you will never see the letter, so it doesn't matter; but if you do, and I pray that you may—well, if I am only worth taking at my best I am not worth taking. I want you to know the worst of me—only you, no one else.

"With Uncle Nic it is not as it is with my stepfather, his opposition only makes me wickedly angry, mad, ready to do anything, but with Uncle Nic I feel so bruised—so sore in my heart. He said: 'It is not so much the money, because there is always mine,' but I could never do a thing he cannot bear, and then take his money, and you would never let me. One knows very little of anything in the world until trouble comes. You know

how it is with flowers and trees, in the early spring they look so quiet and contented and peaceful; then all in a moment they—I think it must be like that with the heart. I used to think I knew a great deal, understood why and how things came about; thought, self-possession, reason seemed easy; now I know nothing; nothing in the world matters but to see you, and hide away from that look in Uncle Nic's eyes. Three months ago I did not know you, now I am writing like this. Whatever I look at I try to see as you would see, and I like to think that I can; I feel now you are away even more than when you were with me, what your thoughts would be, how you would feel about this or that. Perhaps I am all wrong, but I don't think so—some things you have said seem always in my mind like lights——"

She stopped writing and looked up. A slanting drift of rain was striking the verandah tiles with a ceaseless, cold hiss. She closed the window, and went into Mr Treffry's bedroom.

He was lying with his eyes closed, and growling at Dominique, who moved about in noiseless slippers putting the room ready for the night. When he had finished, and with a compassionate bow had left the room, Mr Treffry opened his eyes, and said:

"This is b-beastly stuff of the doctor's, Chris, it puts my monkey up; I can't help swearing after I've taken it; it's as beastly as a vulgar woman's laugh an' I don't know anything beastlier than that."

"I have a letter from Greta, Uncle Nic; shall I read it?"

He nodded, beating a faint tattoo on the bed-clothes with his fingers.

Christian read the letter, leaving out the mention of Harz, and for some undefined reason the part which concerned Sarelli.

"Aye!" said Mr Treffry with a feeble laugh, "Greta an' her money. Send her some more, Chris, and don't you say it's from me. I wish I were a younker again; that's a beast of a proverb about a dog and a d-day. I'd like to go fishing again in the old West with Jan. By Jove! Chris, we had a fine time when we were younkers. You don't get such times in these d-days. 'Twasn't often the smacks went out without us. We'd watch their lights, d'ye see, from our bedroom; when they were swung aboard we were out of the window like knife, an' down to the quay before you could say Jack Robinson. They never let on about it, always waited for us; but Jan was naturally the favourite with 'em, he was the chap for luck, Solomon's own luck he had, fishing. I remember old Tredeare an' Henwood and Polteno fighting for him once, odd man out, which of 'em he should go with. He brought 'em such luck y'see, poo-or old Jan! I say, Chris, when I get on my legs—you an' I, we might go there again, eh? For a bit, just to see, eh? What d'ye say, old girl?"

Their eyes met, and fell apart.

"I'd like to look at the smack lights going to sea on a dark night; you'd like 'em too, Chris;

pity you're such a d-duffer in a boat, we might go out with 'em. Just a look at the old West; Cornish pies! Chris; 'crame!' do you a power o' good, you're not looking the thing, old girl—set you up—more'n you think, more'n you think—" his voice died wistfully; and Christian's glance sweeping his face flew back to her hands, in which she held and twisted Greta's letter. After a minute or two of silence Mr Treffry boomed out with sudden energy:

"After dinner your aunt'll come and sit with me, Chris; don't let her; I feel dam' grateful to her, but don't let her, old girl, I can't stand it. Tell her I'm asleep; the doctor'll be here directly; ask him to make up some humbug for you—it's his business."

He was seized by a violent fit of pain which seemed to stab his breath away, and when it was over signed that he would be left alone.

Christian went back to her letter in the other room, and had written these words, when the gong summoned her to dinner:

"I'm like a leaf in the wind, I put out my hand to one thing, and it's seized and twisted and flung aside. I want you—I want you, if I could see you I think I could know what to do——"

CHAPTER XXII

THE rain drove with increasing fury. The night was immovably black. Nicholas Treffry slept heavily. At the side of his bed the night-lamp glowed outwards, casting upon the wall a bright disc festooned by the hanging shadow of the ceiling Christian leant over him. Across the huddled clothes his hand, pressed to his chest, heaved with each breath, as though at the beat of an unseen hammer. The girl looked, and tears gathered slowly in her eyes. For the moment he filled the whole of her heart, lying there; the silent surrender of his helplessness gave room in her breast for no other thought. Fearful of waking him she slipped into the dark sitting-room, and stood suddenly still. At the window the shape of a man was flattened against the panes. Her heart thumped; she went close to the window, and her fingers flew to the latch. Harz stood outside shaking himself like a dog. He let fall his cape and hat.

"Alois!" She kept repeating the name softly, and touched his sleeve with her fingers. He was sodden with the rain, his face drawn and tired; a dark growth of beard covered his cheeks and chin.

"Where is he?" he said, "I want to see him first." She closed his lips with her hand, but he

caught it and covered it with kisses. Christian gasped.

"He's asleep—ill—speak gently!"

He muttered "I came to him first." Christian tried in the gloom to read his thoughts. "Ah, let me see you!" he entreated, "it is so dark."

She lit the lamp, and he looked at her hungrily without speaking. At last he said, "I came back because it's not possible to go on like this; I came to tell your uncle. He is a *man*. As for the other, I will have nothing to do with him—nothing. I want you; it's not possible to go on like this. I came back on foot through the forests; a fellow came with me, an artist. Christian, Christian!"

She handed him her unfinished letter. He held it to the light, clearing his brow of raindrops. When he had read to the last word he put it back on the table and whispered, "Come" Her lips moved, but she did not speak.

"While it's like this I can't work—do you understand? I can't work, and I *must*. I won't bargain with my work; if it's to be that we are not for each other. What do we wait for? Sooner or later it comes to this. I'm sorry he's ill, God knows! but what does it change? Wait! It's like tying me hand and foot; I'm afraid! Fear kills—it will kill you! it kills work! and I must work, I can't waste time—I won't! *Bei Gott!* I will sooner give you up." He put both his hands upon her shoulders. "I love you! I want you! Look in my eyes! What do I owe these people?

I'm like dirt to them. Do you dare to hold back?"

Suddenly it came home to him that she was struggling.

"Give me a little time," she gasped. "Dear, it is so hard——"

He raised his head, and under his eager eyes the colour rushed up in her face, her pulses throbbed. She came close to him.

"Trust me."

"I do trust you; but—but you don't understand."

She said humbly, "I will learn."

"Learn! Until you have faced this you will not have understood. It's been soft for you always. Till you decide you know nothing——"

There was a sound of knocking on the wall, and Mr Treffry's voice called feebly. Christian started, and signed to Harz to go. "To-morrow!" he whispered, and picking up his hat and cloak went out into the rain.

In the blackness beyond the poplars a voice said abruptly:

"Ain't this amusin'? A person's liable to be drowned." A man appeared at his side, but almost instantly vanished again. "We are going to my old location," he continued nasally. "See here! Is it all right? I do hope to Gosh it is. But don't you tell me if you're not feeling—I say is this amusin'? Is it funny?"

They ploughed along with heads down and boots squelching at each step, looming now and then to each other, as an unevenness of the road brought

them a step or so closer. "Isn't this a game? there's a great thing to be done with a night like this for a big man like you—I've no use for it, too realistic for me, too atmosphery. Some streaky white—top light, see! and blurry below. I annoy you talking? Sorry! A person like me's not to be tolerated."

"Where's the room, Tramper? I'm tired."

"Right close here," and he went on murmuring with cheerful sympathy to himself in the darkness: "This kind of thing makes a party a bit rocky—I'd give a lot to know it's fixed. . . . Here's the shanty! I'm known, it's all right." The lantern of a small hostel swung mournfully over their heads. They beat the rain from each other, and climbed the wooden steps.

By the light of a sulphur match Harz contemplated the pitch-pine boards and crimson blanketed beds of the room. He was dead tired. Heaping his wet clothes outside the door, he got into one of the beds, and almost instantly fell asleep.

When he awoke in the morning, Tramper, seated upon the end of the bed, was staring at him. His uneven teeth held a short corn-cob pipe. He emitted slow whiffs of smoke; spikes of dust-coloured hair were erect upon his head, and his eyes twinkled like a terrier's. He swung one leg.

"I was thinking you resembled a party of the Press who came to see me in Florence when I had that little show of my pictures there. An interesting kind of a galoot. 'A good article—five

hundred lire!' 'No, thank you.' 'A fair article —two hundred lire!' 'No, thank you.' 'A bad article then—twenty lire!' 'My friend, I haven't the money!' 'Well! you've got a better suit of clothes than me anyhow. I'll take 'em and put your name in my paper.'" He chuckled. Suddenly Harz sat up.

"There is nothing for those scoundrels but a whip," he said. "By heavens, if he came to me like that!"

"They ain't worth it. Think of the fun you'd miss!"

"Fun!" said Harz with a dark look. "What about the poor devils they ruin? There would not be very much of that if people had the courage to take a whip to them."

"The Anglo-Saxon is law-abiding, he don't do things that way; his theory is to give a party plenty of rope and let him hang himself."

"In America you do it that way; laws are not made for scoundrels like that."

Tramper got off the bed, and narrowed his eyes.

"Why, in America we do a lot of things; America's a big place, 'tain't been shrunk in the wash yet." He began unstrapping a case covered with tarpaulin, and took out a canvas. "You like it? You do really like it? Fancy that!" and smoothing the picture gently with his hand, he held it against the wall. "You do really think it's amusin'? Well! From what I have seen of your work in London, I never thought you would. It's nice for a person to get

appreciation, ain't it?" His eyes beamed at Harz: "D'you think that little bit of colour's new? Say! d'you think it's a joke? It took me three months—I only went out twice all the time. And you like it?"

He filled his pipe again, and leaned out into the steamy air.

"What I look at is this," he said, turning round and apostrophising Harz with his pipe; "you're *the* man, you're the genuine article—to think you like my work! Well! it's put the stuffing into me."

Harz finished dressing, and began to draw on his boots.

"Look here!" said Tramper watchfully, "don't you go out. That ain't in the bill. This is a game and you hold cards; now don't you go and throw them away."

Harz put his boots aside, and began to pace up and down.

Tramper completed his costume by tightly buttoning a dark, single-breasted jacket, and putting on a pair of high boots.

"I guess you want to know what they've done with your pictures," he said, sucking a finger, "and a lot of other things; that's natural! Well! command me."

The other stopped with a jerk; their eyes met. "You're very good to me. I don't know why." Tramper shuffled his feet and took a long suck at his pipe. "I saw her last night," continued Harz. "Till this is over, it's—it's all darkness! She will

come! she must! Will you do something for me? Bring her to me at Milan. We could be married there, and then—to London."

Tramper stretched out his hand. "I guess I will," he said, "and leave you a big balance." Harz turned white and shook the hand hard. "May be," said Tramper, "I can find your studio, I'll just take a look round. Excuse me!" Putting his hand on the window-sill he vaulted to the ground.

The sun, darting innumerable yellow tongues into the mist, had licked it up, and everything was glistening with tiny bells of water.

Harz remained at the window staring intently into the yard, though there was nothing to be seen but a dog scratching itself and a number of half-sawn logs. A servant in a clean linen frock brought in coffee. He poured out a cup and drank it greedily; he had eaten nothing the day before. He had hardly finished, when the door was again opened, and the servant putting her head in called out abruptly, "*Ein Herr!*" Harz stood up and waited. His visitor was Count Sarelli. The two men bowed to each other. Sarelli put his hat upon the table, drew his gloves off and placed them within it, and stood with his hands folded upon the handle of his stick. His face was pale and dejected. Harz raised his eyebrows.

"*Signor* Harz," said the Italian after a short silence, "we met last night, I think, outside Villa Rubein, though I am not very clear—I was not—in fact I do not remember my words."

"I remember them," said Harz.

"Will you have the kindness to repeat them?"

"You proposed to me that we should hang ourselves one upon each poplar tree to scare the fowl to-morrow, like the vermin we are."

"Ah!" said Sarelli, "good! I was not, you understand, very—but good! Vermin! yes, because we leave our work, *hein?* I gather, however, that you must have refused. This morning I am sober; moreover you have seen her, therefore—I say nothing; but I have one question to ask you. That young lady! are you going to *marry* her?"

Harz looked at him fixedly without answering. Sarelli dropped his eyes.

"Pardon!" he said softly, "you are an honest man."

There was another silence, and Sarelli taking out a handkerchief wiped his brow.

"Again, pardon!" he said, "but I have a respect for her, she is like—like the other." His face twitched, and he touched his own wrist. "The soul of a young girl it is a pulse, it beats slowly—slowly—but in time there comes a fever. Ah! it is profoundly interesting, what you are doing here, *Signor* Harz?" He bowed, took up his hat and gloves, and turned to the door. Harz watched him go without a word; but when the door was closed, he sat down and buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XXIII

IT was not till morning that Christian fell into a troubled sleep. She dreamed that a voice was calling her, calling, calling; it filled her with the dream terror that is so dumb and helpless.

When she woke the light poured in at the window; it was a Sunday, and the cathedral bells were chiming. Her first thought was of Harz. Her future was in her own hands. One step, one moment of courage! Why had she not told her uncle? If he had only asked! "But why?" she thought, "why should I tell him?" When it was over and she was gone, he would see it was for the best.

Her eyes fell on Greta's empty bed. She sprang up and bending over it kissed the cold pillow. "She will mind at first; but it won't matter for her, she is too young, and in time perhaps—ah! nobody will miss me except Uncle Nic, but he—!" She stood a long while in the window without moving. When she was dressed she called to her maid: "Barbi, bring me some milk, I'm going to church."

"*Ach! gnädiges Fräulein*, will you have no breakfast?"

"No, thank you, Barbi."

"*Liebes Fräulein;* what a beautiful morning

after the rain has become ! how cool ! it is for you good, for the colour in your cheeks ; now they will again bloom," and Barbi, stroking her own weather-flushed cheeks, looked at her with beaming eyes.

Dominique, sunning himself outside with a cloth over his arm, bowed as she passed, and smiled affectionately :

" It goes better this morning, *m'mselle.* We march—we are getting on. That will be good news for you ; it will put the heart into you."

Christian thought with a pang :

" How good every one is to me this morning ! "

Even the house seemed to greet her with the sun aslant upon it ; and the trees, trembling and weeping golden tears. At the cathedral she was early for the service, but here and there were figures bending reverently ; the faint and sickly odour of long-burnt incense clung in the air, a priest moved silently at the far end. She knelt. When at last she rose the service had begun, and the sound of intoning swept through the aisles. A sense of peace had come over her—the peace of decision. For bad or good she felt that she had faced her resolve and would be strong in it.

She went out with a look of quiet serenity on her face, and walked homeward along the flood-dyke. Close to the old house she sat down. Now—it was her own, all that belonged to him, that had ever had part in him was her own !

A man in high boots and a cap passed and looked at her sideways ; presently he came back and raised the cap.

"Excuse me! you 'pear to be interested in that house?" he said; "that so? I'm Tramper, yes—Julius Tramper, anything I can do for you or him?" He went on without giving her time to speak. "There's no need for any misapprehension—he's just the man, make no mistake, Miss Christian—he's put the sand into me." Christian rose, her clear eyes were fixed eagerly upon him. Tramper continued, smiling cheerfully, and fidgeting with his cap:

"Fancy now! he came along and put his finger right there. He said to me: 'I know your work; what are you doing this sort of stuff for when you can do that?' and he's right. Why, for three years I've been trying not to make 'em flat, trying to put what they call atmosphere into 'em, because I thought I ought to be in the fashion—realistic—see? They all told me so, but here comes this fellow and says: 'That's all wrong, what you were doing before was the ticket for *you*,' and, by Sam! he's right. I guess I've known it all along; isn't that a game, is that amusin'? Doesn't it show what kind of a ninny a person may be? He said: 'A person's got to tote his wares along according as the Good Lord lets him; what's the meaning of all that neftiness about realism? It's not worth pie.' Not quite that way he put it maybe, but there you have it, and he's right—it means a lot to me." He slapped his thigh, and shifting from leg to leg, blurted out: "Well, anything I can do for you or him?"

Christian stretched out her hand.

"Are you the friend who came with him?"

Tramper took her fingers in his hard hand, and looked at them nervously.

"There's no need for any words between you and me—fellow artists—I hope you're an artist. I think it's the greatest game, don't you? Take things as they come—see your own colour; make your own effects, go where you like for 'em—eh? is that amusin'? Not like the poor fellows who have to keep their coats on where there's more policemen than human beings. Excuse me talking, but you know — between artists. I thought I would get a look in here, but 'pears the door is screwed. I'd be glad to see his pictures—I admire his work."

"I have them," said Christian flushing.

"Well," said Tramper, scratching his head with enthusiasm; "that is great! I think you are just lovely." He mumbled: "You might like to send a message, maybe."

Christian, looking full at him, said in a low voice:

"Will you tell him, please, that I am ready?"

Tramper hitched his trousers; he said in a delighted tone, and gazing studiously at his thumb-nails: "That so? he asked me to bring you along as far as Milan, he guessed the ceremony could be performed there—I'm proud." He raised his cap, and hurried away without looking at her again.

When he had disappeared, Christian got up too; an old beggar man, who had been watching her, came gently from behind.

"Gracious lady! this is the lucky day for you," he said, peering into her eyes; "I am very old—I have lost my luck." Christian opened her purse, there was only one coin in it, a gold piece; the beggar's eyes sparkled.

She thought suddenly: "It's no longer mine, I must begin to be careful now," but she felt ashamed when she looked at the old man. "I am very sorry; yesterday I would have given you this, but —but now it's already given." He seemed so old and poor, what could she give him? There was a little silver brooch at her throat: "You will get something for that," she said; "it's better than nothing; I am very sorry you are so old and poor."

The beggar crossed himself. "Your eyes are kind," he muttered; "may you never want, gracious lady!" Christian hurried on; the words had an ominous sound, but the rustling of the leaves soon swept them away. She did not feel inclined to go in, and crossing the bridge began to climb the hill. There was a gentle breeze, flaky clouds were drifting across the sun, over timber logs by the roadside lizards darted out, looked at her, and whisked off. Below, the sunbeams fell in a shower, dappling the tops of trees, and flashing upon a torrent. The earth smelt sweet, the vine-yards round rain-washed farms glistened; every-thing leaped and danced with sap and life; it was a moment of Spring vouchsafed in Midsummer, fleeting, and the more precious. Christian's heart beat in accord, and she walked on wondering at her own happiness.

"Am I heartless?" she thought. "I'm going to be his wife—I'm going out into life; I shall have to fight now, there'll be no time for looking back."

She came to a bend in the road where a path broke away and wound to the level of the torrent; on the other side it rose again, and was lost among the growth of the trees. She followed it but the woods were dank, and she made haste home.

In her room she began packing, sorting and tearing up old letters. "Only one thing matters," she thought, "singleness of heart; to see the way straight before you, and keep to it. I pray God for strength. Am I going blindly, selfishly? It's decided, I'll keep to it with all my might."

Barbi was standing before her with some clean towels in her hands.

"Are you going a journey, *gnädiges Fräulein*?" she said, with a rather scared look on her face.

Christian looked up; the pupils of her eyes widened and narrowed.

"Yes, Barbi," she said at last, "I am going away to be married; don't speak of it to anyone, please."

Barbi leant a little forward with the towels clasped to her blue-cotton bosom.

"No, no! I will not speak. But, dear Fräulein, that is a big matter, have you well thought?"

"Thought! Barbi, have I not?"

"But, dear Fräulein, will you rich be?"

"Rich! I shall be as poor as you."

"Ach! dear God! that is terrible. There is Katrina, my sister, she is married, she tells me all of her life, she tells me it is very hard, and but for

the money in her stocking it would be harder. Dear Fräulein, think once again. And is he good? Sometimes they are not good."

"He is good," said Christian, rising; "it is all settled," and suddenly she kissed Barbi on the cheek.

"You are crying, dear Fräulein; think yet again, perhaps it is not quite all settled; it is not possible that a maiden should not a way outleave."

Christian smiled: "I don't do things that way, Barbi."

Barbi hung the towels on the horse, and crossed herself.

CHAPTER XXIV

It was late the same afternoon. A tortoise-shell butterfly had found its way in, and fluttered wearily round the ceiling; Mr Treffry's eyes were fixed upon it, the insect's stupidity seemed to have a fascination for him. A plaid shawl was thrown over his shoulders, and the beat of a red fan caused the faintest ruffling in his hair. Christian came softly into the room.

"Couldn't stay in bed, Chris," he called out with an air of guilt. "I feel a l-lot better up; the heat was something awful. The doctor came, and p-piped off in a huff—he's a touchy beggar. Just because o' this—I had to p-promise him I wouldn't." He motioned with the fan towards a jug of claret-cup and a pipe upon the table by his elbow. "I like to look at 'em, though."

Christian sat down by him, and took the fan.

"I feel a l-lot better," he repeated with shaky assertion; "if I could only get out of this heat—" and he closed his eyes.

"I *must* tell him," she thought, "I can't slink away."

"Pour me out some of that stuff, Chris! I don't care a kick for the doctor. I'll have a drink."

She reached absently for the jug. Yes! she would have to tell him; her heart sank.

Mr Treffry took a long draught.

"I've broken my promise; it don't matter—won't hurt anybody but me." He took up the pipe and began to press tobacco into it. "Your poor father would have a fit if he could see me, Chris," he said through a cloud of smoke; "he was rather an old woman in some ways, your fa-ather, Chris; a parson—they can't help it; I was never fothy about 'em. I used to tell your fa-ather that he took a liberty with people's insides. Poo-or John! While I've been lying here with this pain going right through me, Chris, it's been like dying twenty times a day, and—not a smoke the whole time. D'ye tell me anything the parsons can sa-ay does me half the good of this pipe?"

He leant back, his inert bulk steeped in a luxury of satisfaction. Presently he resumed as if pursuing to himself an old train of thought.

"Things have changed a lot since my day; when I was a youngster, a young fellow had to look out for peck and perch—he put the future in his p-pocket. He d-did, or he didn't do, according as he had stuff in him. He can't content with that nowadays, it seems—does a trade upon his own opinion of himself, thinks he is what he says he's going to be."

"You are unjust," said Christian in a low voice, "*he* would never think well of himself unless he had done something truly great; he is always looking for the highest."

Mr Treffry grunted.

"Ah, well! I like to know where I am. If I

lend a man money I like to know whether he's going to pay it back; I d-don't care whether he does or he doesn't, but I like to know. The same with other things. I d-don't care a dump what a man has—though mind you, Chris, it's not a bad rule that measures a man by the credit at his bankers; but when it comes to marriage, that's a very different thing. What's not enough for one an't enough for two. You can't talk black white, or bread into your mouth. I don't care to speak about myself, as you know, Chris, but I tell you this—when I came to London, I wanted to marry —I hadn't any money, an' I had to want; when I had the money—but that's neither here nor there." He frowned, fingering the bowl of his pipe. "I didn't ask her, Chris; I didn't think it the square thing; seems that's out of fashion."

Christian's cheeks burned. Mr Treffry cast side-long glances at her.

"I think a lot while I lie about here, Chris; nothing much else to do, d'ye see? What I ask myself is this: what do you know about what's best for you? What do you know about life? Take it or leave it, Chris, life's not all you think it. It's not an overnice business; give and get all the way through, and the main thing's to have a fair start."

Christian thought: "It may be all true, but it means nothing; I must make my own life; will he never see?"

Mr Treffry went on slowly:

"I get—better—and—better every day; but,

look here, Chris, I can't last for ever; d'ye think it's pleasant for me to lie here, and see you making a fool of yourself, and know that when I'm gone there'll be no one to put a hand on the check string?"

"I am doing right; I'm doing right for what is best in me."

He answered patiently:

"Ah! words won't alter facts, Chris; if you are making a fool of yourself, you are making a fool of yourself. I've lived a long time in the world; I've seen things pretty well as they are; and now there ain't much left for me to think about but you."

Christian laid her fingers on his hand.

"I've been afraid too," she said, "and I hate myself for it. Do you want me to go on being afraid? I love him. Fear! it's mean, it's contemptible. You—you have forgotten!"

Mr Treffry closed his eyes:

"Yes," he said, "I'm old."

The fan had dropped into Christian's lap, it rested upon the snow of her frock like a huge crimson leaf; her eyes were fastened upon it with a frightened stare. "You want me to go on being afraid—I won't! oh! I won't."

Mr Treffry looked at her. "Have you heard from him?" he said with sudden intuition.

"Last night, in that room, when you thought I was talking to Dominique——"

The pipe fell from his hand.

"What?" he stammered, "back? Here? Stuff! He's in Italy, I tell you; I t-took him, I and

the horses; the poor horses. Back! He can't be—why! I— The last decent thing I'll ever do!"

Christian, with a white face, went on:

"He came back. He can't work; he wants me, and I must go to him. It is outside me now, I must go to him."

There was a long silence, she could not meet his eyes.

"You must go to him? Ay!" He repeated the words stolidly.

She wanted to fling herself down, and weep her heart out against his knees; but movement before that motionless figure seemed mean; she remained standing, silent, and with folded hands.

When Mr Treffry spoke, each word was like lead dropped upon her heart.

"The Lord forgive you, Chris! You'll let me know—before you— I've had my d-dose for to-day. Good-night!"

With the closing of the door the thought surged up again in his brain: "Back again. . . . Why! I took him—I and the horses. I killed myself over that job—the last decent thing I'll ever do. . . . But I'm not dead yet!—no!" . . .

Christian stood in the passage. There was nothing but pain in the world, and she could not help it! Why care?

A long bead curtain close by rustled in the draught, and through it voices reached her.

"My honour's involved, or I would give the case up."

"He is very trying, poor Nicholas! He always had the peculiar quality of opposition; it has brought him to grief a hundred times. There is opposition in our blood; all my family have it. My eldest brother died of it; with my poor sister, who was as gentle as a lamb, it took the form of doing the right thing in the wrong place. It is a matter of family temperament, you see. You must have patience."

"Patience," repeated Dawney's slow voice, "is one thing. Patience where there is such responsibility is quite another. I've not had a wink of sleep for two nights."

There was a faint, shrill swish of silk.

"Is he so very ill?"

Christian held her breath for the answer. It came at last.

"Has he made his will? With this trouble in the side again, I tell you plainly, Mrs Decie, I'm afraid."

She put her hands to her ears, and ran out into the air in one of those sudden moments of terror that are the stepping-stones to truth, when the foundations of every-day life seem to reel and stagger; illusions slip away like landmarks as night comes down upon a plain; nothing is left to grasp at, and in a last appeal the soul cries aloud to itself for balance.

She kept saying: "What have I promised?—what have I promised? to leave him dying!"

CHAPTER XXV

UPON the following day Harz, summoned by a message, crossed the Villa threshold into profound stillness. Mr Treffry's bedroom was in disorder; there was a faint scent of Eau de Cologne. He had just risen, and was garbed in a dressing suit, old and worn, which had a certain air of past magnificence. His seamed cheeks were newly shaven; drops of water still clung to his moustache and beard.

"I hope I see you well," he said, breathing with difficulty. Without defining the cause Harz felt ashamed; he thought of the last time he had seen him, dust-covered and imposing beneath the phaeton hood. He felt sorry and ashamed, as a man feels before a comrade whose will he thwarts. Suddenly Christian came into the room; she stood for a moment looking at him; then sat down, and rested her chin upon her hands.

"Chris!" said Mr Treffry reproachfully, but she shook her head, and her eyes did not fall; mournful and intent, they seemed to be full of some secret knowledge.

Mr Treffry spoke: "I've no right to blame you, Mr Harz; and Chris tells me you came to see me first, which is what I would have expected of you; b-but you shouldn't have come back—no!"

"I've come back because I was obliged. I can-

not stop to think of words, let us speak straight to each other."

"I ask n-nothing better," said Mr Treffry.

Harz looked again at Christian, but she made not the faintest motion, sitting always with her chin resting in her hands.

"I have come for her."

"Why?" Mr Treffry lifted his bloodshot eyes; his jaw was thrust forward, the lower lip fast upon his moustache.

"I work for my living, and I make it; by my honour I say we can live—I'll give every minute to bring her comfort. But I can't wait."

"I ask you—why?"

Harz made no answer. Mr Treffry gripped the chair with both hands: "Yes, sir! I ask why? Isn't she worth waiting for? Isn't she worth serving for? The sweetest thing on earth, by God!"

"She's worth all I can do for her, and all heaven besides. But—I've fought and struggled. My art's my life to me. You say: 'It doesn't matter—wait!' You don't understand. I want free hands—free will, or how can I work? I can't do what I must if I'm worth a place in the world at all. You tell me to go! knowing she is here, amongst you who hate me, a thousand lives away from me. There's a death fight against me going on in her—and you think I can work! you think I sha'n't be blind to see, and feeble to do! Others may be able, I'm not. If I loved her less! Could I love her less?

There was a silence, then Mr Treffry said: "Yes! I ask you to d-do that. To my mind it an't right—it an't square to come and ask what you ask. You d-don't know what's in the future for you, you d-don't know even that you can keep your wife; and I tell you it an't pleasant to think you can't hold up your head in your own country."

Harz turned white.

"Seven years ago," he broke out, "I was a boy —starving; I was mad; if you had been in my place, you would have been the same. I did nothing —I never wanted to do anything. I swear it! it was only the hunger and charity. I love my country, it's just as much to me as your country to you; I've been an exile for seven years, perhaps I shall always be—I think I've had punishment enough; but *bei Gott!* if you think I am a rascal, I will go and give myself up. I will make an end of such thoughts as that." He turned on his heel.

"Stop! I beg your p-pardon! Never meant to hurt you. 'Tisn't easy for me to eat words," Mr Treffry added wistfully, "let that count for something." He held out his hand. Harz came quickly back, and took it between his own. Christian's gaze was never for a moment withdrawn from him, the light darting through the half-closed shutters gave to her eyes a strange, bright intensity, and shone in the folds of her white dress like the sheen of birds' wings; it seemed as though she were trying to store within herself a memory.

Mr Treffry glanced uneasily about him.

"God knows I don't want anything but her happiness," he said. "What is it to me if you'd murdered your mother? What is it to me, I say? It's *her* I'm thinking of."

"How can you tell what is happiness to her? You dare to stop us! You're like one trying to keep water apart; *you* bring ruin to her, not I."

Mr Treffry's eyes glowered under their brows, his tufted chin was thrust out; he looked like an old lion in his bulk and grimness.

"D-dare! When you're old like me, and sick like me, you'll know that a notion dies hard; I d-dare, because I believe; a dog don't change his skin. Talk you after your kind, I'll talk after mine. Her father gave her over to me when she was a m-mite of a girl. I've known her all her life. I've—I've loved her—and you come here with your d-dare!" His hand dragged at his beard, and shook as though palsied.

Christian sprang to her feet, a look of terror on her face.

"All right, Chris! all right!—I don't ask for quarter; and by George! I don't give it."

Harz made a gesture of despair.

"I've done the fair thing by you, sir," Mr Treffry went on, "I ask you to do the fair thing by me. I ask you to wait, and come like an honest man, when you can say, 'I see my way—here's this and that for you, certain.' This Art you talk about! what does it do for you? What makes it different from anything else? It don't alter life; or give you what other men have no

right to expect. It don't put grit into you, or keep your hands clean, or prove that two and two m-make five."

"Art! What do you know of it? You!—you worship money. You know nothing of me; if you live a thousand years you'll know nothing. What do I care for your thoughts and your beliefs? I only know myself—I live my own life, not yours. I do what is right in my own eyes, not in yours. I—I refuse because I must."

Mr Treffry took hold of the sleeve of his coat, and as he spoke he tugged at it with his trembling fingers:

"I make you an offer. Your word not to see her or write for a year! Then, position or not, money or no money, if she'll have you, by my beard, I'll make it all right for you."

"No! I could not take your money."

Mr Treffry's cheeks blanched. "What? my money! I do what I like with my money. I'll give her my money. Who'll stop me?"

"I."

"You!"

"Yes."

Mr Treffry made a motion with his hands as though to put the word aside. A kind of despair seemed to suddenly seize upon him. With an effort that shook the room, he rose from his chair, and stood towering above them.

"All my life," he said, and something seemed to click in his throat, "I've tried to face the m-music; but this—I—." He laid hold upon the back of

the chair, it creaked beneath his weight. He called out "Chris!" and sank into his seat.

"Go!" she whispered, "go!" but Mr Treffry's voice sounded again, unexpected and sonorous:

"No! it's nothing! nothing—d'ye hear me, nothing! You, sir; now, as man to man—" He stopped, and turning his body a little touched Christian's hand: "I'm a f-fool!" he said; "it's for the child to say. Well, Chris?"

"Uncle! I gave my word. If he tells me to come——"

Mr Treffry did not stir, he might have been graven in stone, and he kept his fingers upon her hand.

Harz looked in his face; it was seamed, hollow, desperate, with beads of perspiration on the forehead, an unsteady flicker in the eyes. The room was wonderfully still. Suddenly Harz laughed.

"What am I waiting for? One word! You know I can't say it—and, see, she knows—Ah! with her I could do anything, I swear it. . . . What do you torture me for? I—I wouldn't treat a dog so. Why have you brought me here to torture me?" His eyes shone with fury: "One word! but you knew! You knew I wouldn't say it!" He made a sign with his hand and rushed from the room. Christian, on her knees, buried her face. Mr Treffry pressed his handkerchief again and again stealthily to his mouth. It was dyed crimson with the price of his victory.

CHAPTER XXVI

HERR PAUL had been hastily summoned from Vienna by a telegram; he had started forthwith, leaving some unpaid accounts to a more joyful opportunity, amongst them one at a chemist's for a wonderful quack medicine of which he brought several bottles.

He came from his brother-in-law's room with two large tears rolling down his cheeks, and all the morning went about saying, "Poor Nicholas! poor Nicholas! *il n'a pas de chance—il n'a pas de chance.*" It was difficult to find anyone to listen; there was much to do about the sick chamber, and the women waited, scared and silent, for orders that were now and then whispered through the door; but to his own servant he talked for half-an-hour, until Fritz in turn disappeared, to fetch something wanted from the town. Then in despair he stood at the door of his room with a bottle of the medicine in his hand, and his hair rumpled.

"Ah!" he thought, "it is hard to be allowed to do nothing, it is hard to wait; when the heart is suffering, it is frightful! frightful! . . ." He turned back into his room, and looking furtively about him, as though he contemplated a crime, lit a cigar. "Yes," he thought, breathing out a chain of smoke; "it comes to all of us—at some

time it comes to all of us; and what is it, this death we talk of? Is it any worse than this life, this frightful jumble that we make for ourselves? Prrrt! poor Nicholas! after all it is he that has the luck!"

His eyes filled with tears, and drawing a penknife from his pocket he began to stab it into the stuffing of his chair. Scruff, who sat watching the chink of light under the door, turned his head, blinked at him, and, turning again, began tapping feebly with a claw.

"It is intolerable, this uncertainty—to be near, and so far, is not endurable."

He parted his beard with his fingers, and stepped across the room. The dog followed, threw his black-marked muzzle upwards with a gruff noise, and returned to the door.

Herr Paul held in his hand a bottle of champagne. Narrowing his eyes, he drew the cork. "Poor Nicholas!" he thought, "he chose it," and he drained a glass. "Poor Nicholas! the prince of fellows, and of what use is one! My God! they keep me away from him!" His eyes fell upon the terrier. "Ach, my dear!" he said apostrophising, "you and I, we alone are kept away."

He drained a second glass.

"And what is it," he thought, "this life of ours —froth like this," and he drained the third glass. "Forget! If one cannot help, it is better to forget." He put his hat upon his head. "Yes, there is no room for me here, *allons!* I am not wanted." He

finished the bottle and opened the door. Scruff ran and lay down at the door of Mr Treffry's room. Herr Paul looked at him. "Ach!" he said, tapping his chest as he went out, "ungrateful!" . . .

Late that afternoon Greta stole hatless into the garden; she looked tired after her night journey, and sat idly on a chair in the speckled shade of a lime-tree.

"It is not like home," she thought. "I am very unhappy. Even the birds are silent, but perhaps that is because of the heat. I have never been sad like this—for it is not fancy that I am sad this time, as it sometimes is. It is in my heart like the sound the wind makes through a wood, it feels quite empty in my heart. If it is always like this to be unhappy, then I am sorry for all the unhappy things in the world; I am sorrier than I ever was before."

A shadow fell on the grass before her, she raised her eyes, and saw Dawney. He was standing on the other side of the tree, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his coat.

"Dr Edmund!" she whispered.

He turned to her and smiled faintly; a heavy furrow showed between his brows; his eyes, always rather close together, seemed continually staring at something he was trying to bring before them.

"Dr Edmund," whispered Greta again, "is it true?"

He took her hand, and spreading his own palm over it, smoothed it gently.

"Perhaps!" he said, "perhaps not! One must hope."

Greta left her hand in his, and looked up with awed eyes.

"They say he is dying!"

"We must hope—we have sent for the best man in Vienna; think! that means something."

Greta shook her head gravely:

"But you are clever, Dr Edmund, and *you* are afraid."

"See!" said Dawney, "*he* is brave; we must all be brave, you know; you too."

"Brave?" repeated Greta, "what is it to be brave? If it is not to cry and make a fuss—that I can do. But if it is not to be sad here," she touched her breast, "that I cannot do, and it shall not be any good for me to try."

"To be brave is to hope; don't give up hope, that's cowardice."

"No," said Greta, tracing the pattern of the sunlight upon her skirt with the tip of her finger; "I think that when we hope we are not brave, because we are expecting something for ourselves. Chris says that hope is prayer, and if it is prayer, then all the time we are hoping we are asking for something; and it is not being brave to ask for things."

A smile curved the corners of Dawney's mouth.

"Go on, O little philosopher," he said, "and be brave in your own way, it will be just as good as anybody else's."

"What are you going to do to be brave, Dr Edmund?"

"I?" he said, drawling; "I suppose I am going to fight it out. If we only had time! and five

years off his life!" He sighed, and drawing a deep breath, struck out at the air with his fists: "If the God of battles would lend a hand! Good-bye, guide, philosopher and friend—Bless you!"

Greta watched him step noiselessly through the window.

"I shall never be brave," she mourned, "I shall always be wanting to be happy," and, kneeling down, she began to disentangle a fly that was being bound faster and faster into a web and gave the most pitiful little jerks to the silky, bluish threads. A plant of hemlock had sprung up in the long grass under the trees. She thought with dismay: "Why, they have let weeds grow!" It seemed an additional sign of the death of joy that was so plain to her. "But it's very beautiful," she thought again, "and the blossoms are like stars. I am not going to pull it up, I will leave it, perhaps it will spread all over the garden; I do not care if it does, for now things are not like they used to be, and I do not think they ever shall be again."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE days went by ; those long, hot days, when a haze of heat swims up into the air about ten of the forenoon, and, as the sun sinks over the mountains melts into golden ether which sets the world aquiver, and rains upon it a thousand sparkles.

With the lighting of a star the sparkles die, vanishing one by one off the hillsides ; evening comes flying over the valleys, and life rests, breathing under her cool wings. With a sort of sob night falls ; a hundred little voices of the night arise.

It was drawing near the grape-gathering, and in the tides of the heat the fight for Nicholas Treffry's life went on, day in, day out, with gleams of hope and moments of despair. Doctors came, but after the first he refused to see them.

"No," he said to Dawney, "I won't. Too many cooks ! throwing away my money upon a p-parcel of doctors. If I pull through, it won't be because of them. . . . *You!* oh ! that's different. I thank you."

At that time for days together he would allow no one but Dominique and the paid nurse in his room.

"I can stand it better," he said to Christian, "when I don't see any of you—it hurts me less ; keep away, old girl, and let me get on

with my dying." If she could have done anything to help, it would have lightened the strain on her nerves and the ache at her heart. At his own request they had moved his bed into a corner so that he might face the wall. There he would lie for hours together, not moving or speaking a word, except now and then to ask for drink.

Sometimes Christian crept in unnoticed, and sat watching, with her lips pressed together, and her arms folded tightly across her breast. At night, when Greta was asleep, she would turn her burning face from side to side upon her pillow, and her lips would form half-uttered feverish prayers. She spent hours at her little table in the schoolroom with a pen in her hand, writing, and thinking over letters to Harz that were never sent. Once she wrote these words: "I am the most wicked of women — I have wished for his death!" . . . Miss Naylor found her with her head buried on her arms, and the table strewn with little scraps of paper. Christian looked up, the tears were streaming down her cheeks: "Don't touch me!" she cried, and springing up rushed away. An hour later she stole into her uncle's room, and sank on the floor at the foot of the bed She sat there silently all through the evening. When night came she could hardly be persuaded to go, and pressed her lips to his damp forehead, whispering, "I love you."

One day Mr Treffry expressed a wish to see

Herr Paul; it was a long while before the latter could summon courage to go in.

"There's a few dozen of the Gordon sherry at my chambers, Paul," and Mr Treffry's eyes twinkled with a spark of their old cynicism; "I'd be glad to think you had 'em. And my man, Dominique, I've made him all right in my will, but I'd like an eye kept on the fellow; he's a good sort for a f-foreigner, and he's no chicken, but sooner or later the women get hold of 'em, and they go to the d-dogs like the rest of us. Well, I think that's all I had to say. Send Chris to me!"

Herr Paul stood by the bedside quite unable to speak a word. Suddenly he blurted out:

"Ah! my dear! courage, courage! we are all mortal—you will get well," and, putting his hands up to his eyes, fled from the room. All the rest of the morning he walked about inconsolable, saying:

"If I had only stayed I could have talked to him, told him the news; he would have cheered up. My God! we would have pulled him through! But it was frightful to see him, you know, but frightful! an iron man could not have borne it."

When Christian came to him, Mr Treffry raised himself and looked at her a long while.

"I ain't going to die, Chris," he said; "I can't, while you—I'm going to see it through." She buried her face in her hands to get away from the wistfulness of his face that was like an accusation.

That very afternoon the news came from the

sickroom that he was better, having had no pain for several hours.

Everyone went about with smiles lurking in their eyes, and ready to break out at a word. In the kitchen Barbi burst out crying, and, forgetting to turn the pan, spoiled the *Kaiser-Schmarn* she was helping to make. Dominique, unable to contain himself, was observed draining a flask of Chianti, and rolling his eyes above it; when he had finished he solemnly cast forth the last drops, as it were a libation, into the sunlight. An order was given for tea to be taken to the arbour under the acacias, where it was always cool; and it was felt that something in the nature of solemn festival was being held. Even Herr Paul was present; Christian alone did not come, the arbour was too full of a memory. Nobody spoke of illness, in the superstition that to mention it might break the spell of respite. Miss Naylor, who had gone into the house to fetch a book, presently came back, and said with a nervous little twist of her face: "There is a strange man standing over there by the corner of the verandah."

"Really!" said Mrs Decie, "what does he want?"

"I did not ask him," said Miss Naylor reddening. "I don't—know—if he is quite respectable. His coat is buttoned very high up, and he—doesn't appear—to have any—collar."

"Go and see what he wants, dear child," said Mrs Decie to Greta.

"I don't know—I really don't know," began Miss Naylor; "he has very—high—boots," but Greta was

already on her way, her hands clasped behind her back, and her demure eyes fixed upon the stranger's figure.

"Please!" she said, when she was close to him.

The stranger removed his cap with a jerk, and shifted uneasily from leg to leg.

"I guess this house has no bells; it has a tendency to discourage a person," he said at last.

"Yes," said Greta gravely, "there is a bell, but it does not ring now, because Uncle Nic is so ill."

"I am very sorry to hear it. I don't know the people here, but I am very sorry to hear it. I would be glad to speak a few words to your sister."

Greta gazed at him for a minute, and the stranger's face grew furiously red.

"Is it," she said with intuition, "that you are a friend of Herr Harz? If you are a friend of *his* you will please come and have some tea, and while you are having tea I will look for Chris."

The perspiration bedewed Tramper's forehead.

"Tea!" he stammered in despair. "Excuse me! I don't drink it, you know."

"There is also coffee," said Greta over her shoulder.

Tramper's progress towards the arbour was slow; Greta arrived some steps in advance, and whispered:

"It is a friend of Herr Harz, and he will drink coffee. I am going to find Chris."

"Greta!" gasped Miss Naylor.

Mrs Decie put up her hand.

"Ah!" she said, and her smile was as the

apotheosis of knowledge; "if it is so we must be very nice to him for Christian's sake."

Miss Naylor's face grew soft. "Ah, yes," she said, "for Christian's sake—of course," and she began ladling spoonful after spoonful of the frothy cream into the coffee which Mrs Decie had poured out. Herr Paul, who was sitting with his hands upon his knees, shrugged his shoulders.

"Prrt!" he muttered with a grimace, "that recommences!"

"Paul!" murmured Mrs Decie, "I regret that you lack the elements of wisdom."

Herr Paul glared furtively at the approaching stranger.

Mrs Decie rose and held out her hand.

"We are so glad to know you, you too are an artist? I take a great interest in art, and especially in that school which Mr Harz represents. I feel sure I should know your name—Tramper? Ye-es——"

Her pale eyes transfixed his face, the cut of his coat, his high boots; her pale lips smiled perpetual encouragement.

"Mr Harz is an artist of unusual ability, a little rash, perhaps, but that is a matter of temperament."

Tramper smiled with exquisite discomfort, and blurted out:

"He is the genuine article, ma'am—excuse me, but he don't represent any school, he is one of that kind whose corpses make schools."

A flicker passed over the mask of Mrs Decie's face. "An original?" it seemed to say.

"Ah!" she murmured, "you are an American. Won't you sit down? My niece will be here directly."

Greta came running back.

"Will you come, please?" she said, standing stock still, and gazing at Tramper. "Chris is ready."

Gulping down his coffee, he clutched his cap, and, with a semi-circular bow, followed her.

"Ach!" said Herr Paul with an indescribable gesture, and fixing his eyes scathingly upon Miss Naylor, "*voilà un garçon très chic!*"

Christian was standing by her little table. She waited for Tramper to speak. Looking at her, he thought, "Is this the same girl I saw on the wall that morning? That girl was calm and sweet; her eyes were just wells; but this girl! This girl's like a white flame! How she stands there, with her hand bent back against that table!"

His instinct told him to speak straight out. "I am sending along his other things — there are some pictures here; he would be glad to have them."

A flood of crimson swept over her face.

"I am sending them to London, I guess I might take them to-day."

"They are ready, my sister will show you."

"She suffers!" he thought. "I wish I were a thousand miles away!" Her eyes seemed suddenly to dart into his soul, and try to drag something from it. "She wants to ask something, poor thing! Poor thing!"

Suddenly the words rushed from her lips: "Is there any message to me?"

His eyes fell. "No," he stammered, "no! I guess not. He is well. . . . I wish to God there were. I am—" He stopped, for her white face seemed to flash scorn, despair, and entreaty upon him in a single breath. Suddenly she held out her hands.

"You are good! You were very good to come."

"Don't! I—he will be just glad to have that picture of you; and—and I guess he's played the *man* over this, *you* wouldn't wish to have him to act the other way."

Outside the door he stared like a man stupefied.

"Gosh!" he muttered.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHEN Christian went that evening to her uncle's room he was sitting up in bed, and began at once to talk with a restless and feeble energy.

"Chris," he said, "I can't stand this dying here by inches. I'm going to try what a journey'll do for me. I want to get back to the old country. The doctor's promised; he won't back down on his word. M-may be there's a shot in the locker yet, Chris! I b-believe in that young chap; he's stuck to me through this like a man. There's grit in that fellow. I used to think he was one of those clever, nonchalanty, extravagant b-beggars they wash out o' your 'varsities nowadays by the dozen, but there's holdfast to him, he'll make his mark. . . . What day of the month is it, Chris? the 19th, eh? of August—a Sunday; why, it's your birthday on Tuesday—how old will you be? Twenty! Ay! Three from twenty's seventeen. Seventeen years since your fa-ather died. You've been a lot to me, old girl. . . . A parson came here to-day. They brought his card in. Thought it his duty to come! Very civil of him! I wouldn't see him though. What's the good? Eh-h! what's the good? If there's anything in what they tell you, I'm not going to sneak in at this time o' day. No-o! you've got to find out

things for yourself down here; can't say *I've* found out much except that I don't want to die, Chris"; he pressed his hand over his mouth as if to still the twitching of his cheeks; "but here I lie—Jo-ove! what a pitiful b-business! There's one thing that's been a lot on my mind. I took advantage of *him* with this d-dam' pitifulness—I took advantage of him. You've a right to look at me, as I've seen you sometimes when you thought I was asleep. I d-don't blame you, Chris—not I, by Jove! Eh? you love me? Ay! ay! I know that, old girl. It don't much matter anyway; one's alone when it comes to the run in; there's a precious lot of humbug in the world, but it don't cure that. Don't cry, Chris! Our minds ain't Sunday-school books, and you're finding it out, that's all. I'm proud of you, there's nothing of the m-milksop—" He sighed, and, turning, lay with his face to the wall.

The noise of sun-blinds pulled up vibrated faintly through the house. A feeling of terror seized upon the girl; he lay so still, but the drawing of every breath seemed a fight. If she could only suffer for him! She went close, and bent over: "Uncle!" she whispered.

"Eh! Chris! It's air we want, you and I," but a few minutes later he seemed asleep. Christian beckoned to the nurse in the next room, and stole out through the window.

To the beat of a single drum a regiment was passing in the road, and she stood half-hidden

amongst the lilac-bushes watching them. It was dusk, the leaves of the poplars drooped lifeless and black above her head, the dust raised by the soldiers' feet hung in the air; it seemed as if in the whole world no freshness, no life were stirring. The tramp of feet died away. Suddenly within arm's length of her a man appeared, his stick shouldered like a sword. He raised his hat.

"Good evening! You do not remember me? Sarelli. Pardon! You looked like a ghost standing there. How badly those fellows marched! We hang upon the skirts of our profession, you see, and criticise; it is all we are fit for, *hein?* But not all of us—not all." His black eyes, restless and malevolent like those of a swan, seemed to stab and dart upon her face. "A fine evening! too hot. The storm is wanted; you feel that. It is weary waiting for the storm; but afterwards, my dear young lady, afterwards perhaps, there is peace, who knows?" He smiled gently, and, baring his head again, was lost to view in the shadow of the trees.

The figure appeared to Christian like the sudden manifestation of a hidden force. She thrust out her hands. "No use!" she thought; "it's within me, nothing can keep it away." She went to Mrs Decie's room where her aunt and Miss Naylor were conversing in low tones. To see them and hear their voices brought back the touch of that everyday world which had no lot in the terrifying powers within her.

Dawney slept now at the villa. In the dead of

the night he was awakened by a light flashed in his eyes. Christian was standing by him. Her face was pale and wild with terror, her hair fell in dark masses on her shoulders.

He sat up in bed and stared, the flame of the candle imparting a yellow hue to his round and self-possessed visage.

"Save him! Save him!" she cried. "I have had such thoughts. Quick! the bleeding!—he called to me!"

He saw her muffle her face in the white drapery of her sleeves; seizing the candle, he jumped out of bed, and rushed from the room.

The internal hæmorrhage had come again, and Nicholas Treffry wavered between life and death. When it had ceased, he sank into a sort of stupor. About six o'clock he recovered consciousness; by watching his eyes closely, they could see that some mental struggle was taking place within him. He singled Christian out from the others by a sign.

"I'm b-beat, Chris," he whispered, "beat. Let *him* know, I want to see him." His voice grew a little stronger: "I d-did my best, thought I could see it through, y'see—m-mean't to—but here's death, so what's the good?" He lifted his hand ever so little, and heavily let it fall.

Later he asked if it had been done; when she answered that a telegram had been sent, his eyes expressed satisfaction. . . .

Herr Paul came down, perfumed, and in ignorance of the night's events. He stopped in front of the barometer and tapped it, remarking to Miss

Naylor, "The glass has gone downstairs, we shall have cool weather; it will go well with him yet." With her kindly, brown face all twisted by pity and concern, she told him that it was now only a question of hours. Herr Paul turned first purple, then pale, and sitting down trembled violently. "I cannot believe it," he exclaimed almost angrily, "yesterday he was so well! Ah! these doctors! I refuse to believe it. Poor Nicholas! He spoke to me yesterday!" and taking Miss Naylor's hand, clutched it between his own. "Ah!" he cried, letting it go suddenly, and striking his forehead, "it is too terrible; he spoke to me yesterday! Is there nobody then who can do good?"

"There is only God," replied Miss Naylor softly.

"God?" repeated Herr Paul in a scared voice.

"We — can — all — pray to Him," she said solemnly, and a little spot of colour came into each of her cheeks; suddenly the flush spread all over her face, her eyes brightened. "I am going to do it—now." Herr Paul raised her hand to his lips.

"Are you?" he said, "good! good! I too." He squared his shoulders, and passing through the door of his study, closed it carefully behind him, and for some unknown reason set his back against it. "Ugh!" he shuddered. "Death! it comes to all of us. Some day it must come to me; it might be to-morrow. Poor Nicholas, one must pray for him. I am a wretched sinner; one must pray."

The day dragged to its end. In the sky clouds had mustered, and, crowding close on one another, clung round the sun, soft, thick, and grey-white,

like the feathers on a pigeon's breast. Towards evening a faint trembling made itself felt at long intervals as from the shock of immensely distant earthquakes.

Nobody went to bed that night, but in the morning the report was the same: "Unconscious —a question of hours." Once only during the day did he recover consciousness, and then he asked for Harz. He was told that he was on the way. The message had come through Tramper.

Towards seven of the evening, the long expected storm broke in a sky like ink. Into the valleys and over the crests of mountains it seemed as though an invisible hand were spilling from the heavens goblets of pale wine; darting a sword-blade zigzag through trees, over roofs, spires, peaks, and into the very firmament, which answered every thrust with the clang of groans. Just beyond the verandah Greta saw a glow-worm shining, as it might be a tiny bead of the fallen lightning. Soon the rain covered everything. Sometimes a jet of light, more rarely vivid, flung across the hill-tops brought them towering, dark and hard over the house, to vanish again behind a grey sea of raindrops and shaken leaves. Each breath drawn by the storm was like the clash of a thousand cymbals; and in his room Mr Treffry lay unconscious of its fury.

Greta had crept in unobserved, and sat curled up in a corner, with Scruff in her arms, rocking herself slightly to and fro. When Christian passed she caught her skirt, and said in a whisper: "It is

your birthday, Chris!" In a low chair by the bed Dawney rested his head on his hand. Christian came to his side and whispered: "Is he going like that? I must speak to him; can't you do anything?"

"He will come to himself before the end," he answered; "may be any minute now; if you have something to say you must be ready; it will be sudden."

She sat down to watch. Sometimes a pale gleam of lightning cast a breath of unearthly life upon his features, and her heart would stop beating with suspense. She trembled. To die in his place —how easy! To choke her thoughts! Her heart cried for forgiveness.

He stirred.

"What's that? Thunder?—it's cooler. Where am I? Chris!" Dawney signed for her to take his place; he looked down at Greta, asleep now with the dog in her arms, and thought: "How did she come there? Poor child! let her be, sleep's the best thing for all of us."

"Chris!" said Mr Treffry, "it's pretty near now." She bent across him, and her tears fell upon his forehead. He raised his finger and touched her cheek.

"You're like an angel, Chris, all white."

"Forgive!" she whispered, "love me!"

"It's all right, old girl—just you sit by and hold my hand. Has he come? No?—I'll hang on a b-bit yet." For an hour or more he did not speak, though once or twice he moaned a little,

and faintly tightened his pressure on her fingers. The storm had sunk behind the blackness of the night, lightning no longer blanched the steady glow of the candles upon the table. Afar off the thunder muttered.

Christian looked up, his eyes were open again; they rested on her a moment, then passed beyond into that abyss which separates youth and age, conviction and conviction, soul and soul. "He's a long time coming. I had a l-lot of things to say—all ends, loose ends, nothing finished—nothing finished; I did my best, but what's the good? Man and woman—Spring—Some day—like me——It's awfully dark, Chris. What did I say? Dies hard!"

She did not sob once. At the foot of the bed Dawney stood covering his face; behind him Dominique knelt with hands held upwards; the sound of Greta's breathing rose and fell softly in the stillness.

"The smack lights are putting out—wake up, Jan!"

"Darling!"

His eyes gleamed. "The reins have slipped—All right, old girl. D-don't y' fret!"

He did not speak again; and a little later, in the last growling of the thunder, Nicholas Treffry's light put out to sea.

CHAPTER XXIX

It was nearly midnight when Harz arrived. Dominique, who sat nodding and blinking by the front door, started up to open it, and took him to the room which had been prepared by Mrs Decie's orders. But he could not sleep, and at the first sigh of dawn went softly downstairs.

A faint glow of light came from an open door; he groped his way towards it. Christian was kneeling by her uncle's body. He turned to go; but she had heard, and beckoned him to the bedside. The dead face was so gravely quiet, that pain, longing, regret might never have been near it.

In the night the drooping moustache and pointed beard had whitened; not a single furrow was left upon the brows. Harz whispered:

"It's light shall we go out?"

She nodded.

When they were out of doors she led the way, and he followed without a word; her figure seemed to slip along before him like a shadow. She turned on to the river wall. It shone in a white streak under the mist; and the trees were changing from black to grey, and from grey to green; in the dusk of the sky douds were stringing out in long white lines, like flights of birds; the snow peaks in the east, clear and rosy above the mystery that lay

upon all else, seemed to be watching. They came to the bench beneath the poplar tree, their first meeting-place. After a moment's hesitation she sat down.

Her face was so strange that a feeling almost of anger sprang up within Harz. Why did she hide her sorrow? Was not everything of hers also his?

He began to speak words of pity, but they seemed to choke in his throat.

"You needn't pity me," she said, holding up her face. "I'm as strong as steel. I feel like steel." He tried to draw her into his arms, but she shrank back, and he put his hands to his head like a man bewildered.

"You see!" she cried with a kind of triumph, "you don't know me. Am I what you expected to find? You thought you'd find what you left, and now you don't know me. Ah! but I know myself!"

"You—you love me?" he stammered.

"Love? is it love? What is it that burns—that shows you yourself till you see there's nothing but self in you? It's taken away all that seemed high and noble. What is it?"

Harz fixed his eyes fiercely upon her. She sat leaning against the tree stem, her hands clasped in her lap; a wisp of hair had come loose across her cheek, and her face was set. He felt afraid.

"Is this our meeting after so long?"

Christian went on as if he had not spoken.

"What was I like? You changed me. There are no illusions now, they're all gone. Don't touch

me! I don't want to be touched, that's what's left—if there's *anything* left! Who is going to give me back myself—my thoughts? Are you? Is anyone?"

"But what have I done? Illusions! Life is not illusions, it's truth. Do you think I am not sorry? Do you think I haven't suffered? A thousand times I love you! What is it you want?"

"Have you suffered, I wonder? What have you to give me in the place of my dreams before these weeks came and I knew——"

He repeated, "I love you!"

"You can't put the stars back in the heavens, you can't put the dew back on these leaves. I can pray to God, but even he can't——" She buried her face in her hands.

"This is madness," cried Harz, and suddenly he thought; "but it's truth. Am I going to lose her after all?" He jumped up.

"Did you think your life would stand still? What did you look for?" and he tried to pull her hands from her face. She left them passive in his grasp.

"I'm not afraid," she said, looking into his eyes; "I've stared at evil. Do you know what that is? it's staring at yourself, there's no other way. I wished him—to die. Did you think I should go on like a child with that struggle here?" She put her hand to her breast. "It wasn't fair! Ah! it wasn't fair. Do you know what thoughts I've had?"

Harz tightened his grasp on her wrists.

"Thoughts!" he cried. "It's *you*—body—and soul I love; your soul is great, or I would not love you; by heaven, no!"

Christian opened her hands. "You hurt me!" she said.

It was like a blow in the face, and he dropped her wrists.

"He knew I would have died for him," she went on in a low voice, "yet I longed for his death. Can you tell me the meaning? What do you know of me? Nothing. I thought love meant that. I thought it meant many things, but it's all self. You think you love me! you love yourself."

"It's false."

"It's the truth. What made you go away? Fear! You were afraid to fall in your own eyes. When I knew what I was really like, I prayed to die—I couldn't bear to see how ugly I was; I wanted to keep myself clean, but I *have* seen—I *have* fallen——"

He said quickly: "What then? Have the courage to be yourself! I will tell you what is not fine: pretence, sneaking from the truth, regret. We aren't slaves. Are we to hide a thought and pretend it is not there, if it isn't nice; what they call 'nice'! That's not fine, it's common. I tell you nothing's fine that has not been dragged through mud, all the rest is trick-work, common sham."

"Sham!" repeated Christian; "is suffering a sham?"

"I say we have done with shams. What certainty is there if you don't face the worst? In cowardice, in dreams? Nothing is certain but ourselves."

She laughed.

"Ah!" cried Harz, with sudden passion, "if you are tired of me, I can go!"

Her eyes blazed.

"What do you care?" she cried. "Go! if you like. You tore my heart between you. Did you care that I was alone? Did you care? 'If you are tired of me!' . . . Go!" and she covered her face.

He shouted, "I will go!"

Before he had taken a dozen steps he stood still. What was he going to do? He wanted to throw himself at her feet; he wanted to rush away, and never look back.

The sun had cleared the mist, and the rain-drops on the vines were shining like a million tiny lamps; a throstle had begun to whistle over his head. Christian was sitting as he had left her. Harz felt a sudden horror of himself. He went back, and said:

"I'm a brute! I think only of myself. Forgive me!"

Christian took her hands from her face.

"There's nothing to forgive." And for what seemed a long time neither spoke. At last Harz asked:

"Shall I go?"

She shook her head.

A call of bugles rang out from across the river. Christian rose, her face white, her eyes all dark with weariness.

They returned to the Villa, and Harz went with her to the very door of her room.

"I am going to Tramper's," he said. "If you want me you have only to send—God bless you, dearest!"

Christian looked at him.

"And you," she whispered.

In her room she dropped upon the bed, and her head had but touched the pillow before she was asleep.

CHAPTER XXX

It was an afternoon in March nearly three years after Mr Treffry's death. Christian was sitting at the window of a studio in St John's Wood. She was looking up at the sky, all grey with soft, high clouds through which shone little patches of gold. Now and then a few drops of rain would fall, sprinkling the trees, where every twig was curled upward, as if awaiting the gift of its new leaves. It seemed to her that the boughs thickened and budded under her very eyes; a great concourse of sparrows had gathered upon them and kept raising a shrill chatter. On the far side of the room Harz was working at a picture.

She took a letter from her pocket.

" . . . Oh! Chris, we are really coming, I seem to be always telling myself, and I have told Scruff a great many times, but he does not care very much because he is getting old. Miss Naylor says that we shall arrive in the morning for breakfast, and that we shall be hungry—but perhaps she will not be very hungry, if it is rough. Papa said to me: '*Je serai inconsolable, mais inconsolable!*' but I think he will not be, because he is going to Vienna. When we are come, there will be nobody at Villa Rubein; Aunt Constance has gone a fortnight ago to Florence,

there is a young man at her hotel, she says he will be one of the greatest playwriters in all England, and she sent me a play of his to read; it was only a little about love, Chris, I did not like it very much. . . . Oh! Chris, I think I shall cry when I see you. As I am quite grown up now, Miss Naylor is not to come back with me; sometimes she is sad, but she will be glad to see you, Chris. She seems always sadder when the spring comes. To-day I walked along the wall, the little green balls are coming on the poplars there, and I saw one chafer, it will not be long before the cherry-blossom comes; and oh! Chris, I felt so funny, sad and happy together, and once I thought I had wings and could fly away up the valley, but I had none, so I sat upon the bench where we sat the day we took the pictures, and I thought and thought; there was nothing came to me in my thoughts, but all was sweet and a little noisy, and rather sad; it was like the buzzing of the chafer in my head; and now I feel so tired and all my blood is running up and down me, but I do not mind, because I know it is the spring.

"Dominique came to see us the other day; he is very well, and is half the proprietor of the Adler Hotel at Meran; he is not at all different, and he asked about you and about Alois—do you know, Chris, to myself I call him Herr Harz, but when I have seen him this time I shall call him Alois in my heart also.

"I have a letter from Doctor Edmund, and he is

in London, so perhaps you have seen him, only he has a great many patients and some that he has 'hopes of killing soon!' and especially one old lady because she is always wanting him to do things for her, and he is never saying 'No,' so he does not like her. He says he is getting old. When I have finished this letter I am going to write and tell him that perhaps he shall soon see me, and then I think he will be very sad. Now that the spring is come there are more flowers to take to uncle Nic's grave, and every day when I am gone Barbi is to take them so that he shall not miss you, Chris, because all the flowers I take there are for *you*.

"I am buying some things without paint on them for my niece. Oh! Chris, this will be the first baby that I have known!

"I am only to stay three weeks with you, but I think when I am once there I shall be staying longer. I send a kiss for the Mädi, and to Herr Harz, my love—that is the last time I shall call him Herr Harz; and to you, Chris, all the joy that is in my heart. Your loving GRETA."

Christian rose, and went up to her husband.

"Are you glad Greta is coming?" she asked.

He turned his head. "Surely," he said.

"Don't you think it's wonderful that father has let her?" Harz stopped painting, his eyebrows slanted upwards, and he looked at her quizzically.

"I do not think so; he is not a strong man at all, and—perhaps he has heard about my pictures, that I am not altogether an impostor."

Christian put her hand on his arm.

"You've improved that background to-day."

He drew his heels to "attention," and peered at the picture with narrowed eyes.

"I will get it better—there's a lot to be done to it."

Christian gave a faint sigh. Harz put his lips to her hand.

"Dearie," he said, "are you tired?"

"No, it's only—what Greta says in her letter about the spring, it makes one want things," and, slipping her hand from his arm, she went back to the window. Harz looked after her, shook himself, and went on painting. A voice from the door said, "I guess I'm in the way," and the head of Tramper appeared dishevelled and apologetic.

"No, no!" called Harz. "Come in! Come in!"

Tramper entered, and, after a glance at the picture, took a seat in the window by Christian.

"Mrs Christian," he said, after a while, "excuse me, but what are you looking for up there?"

"All sorts of things in those clouds," answered Christian.

Tramper asked permission to smoke, and began whistling gently. His little, kindly eyes glanced backwards and forwards from his pipe to Christian's face.

"Maybe that's a tough job," he jerked out at last.

"Not tougher than always keeping one's eyes on the ground."

"That's so," he answered.

Christian went on, "But I know I shall never see any of them; I've no will of my own now. It's only sometimes that I mind—like to-day, when——" She stopped.

Tramper regarded his thumb nails, and bit a large portion out of one of them.

"I believe," he said to his boots, "there's times we'd all like to fly."

Christian sighed. "After all, I wouldn't if I could. I should be afraid to lose what I've got." She turned to him with a sudden, bright look. "You see, I wouldn't have my life different really."

Tramper blurted out softly:

"Mrs Christian, to see you and him makes a party think of two stars with just one twinkle."

Christian looked at Harz. Presently she rose and went across to him.

Tramper blew out a cloud of smoke. He stared dubiously at the sky.

"Well," he muttered, "I guess it's all kind of a compromise, any way!"

THE END

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